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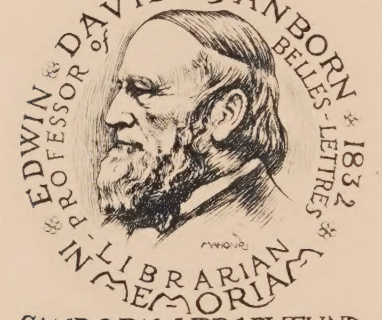

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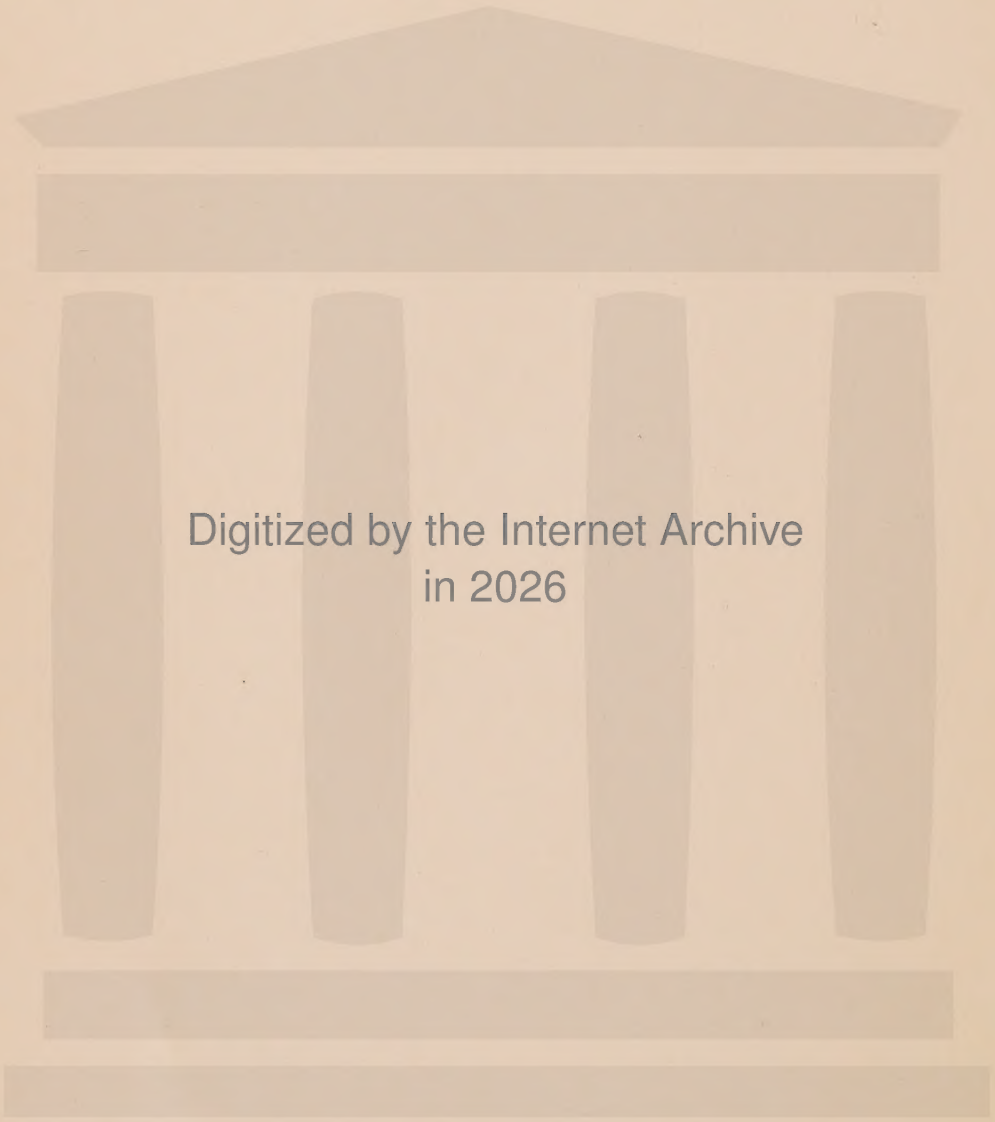
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THE PAINTINGS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

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WILLIAM BLAKE
IN
THE PLAN OF HIS DAYS

CHAPTER ONE

YEARS OF PUPILAGE (1757-1784)

I

A man's life is the seed-plot of his achievement; and the value of the achievement is the worth of that life. If a life is only to be known by a table of events, it is already dead in the recital (whatever secret splendour it might have made and borne away), and belongs to the past. But if its achievement was communicated, or be communicable, then the value of the achievement and the worth of the life are parts of one another, and parts of an ever-living present.

"Every man's wisdom," Blake said, "is peculiar to his individuality." Not apart from that individuality is the wisdom to be known, accurately, with its own aroma and colour, as purchased in time to exist in triumph over time; knowing neither a past nor a future, only a present, in which it expands like a flower in a still air. Therefore it is necessary to discover the seed-plot of a man's days in order to see the individuality that grew there, and flowered in whatever of wisdom and beauty are communicable to others.

These things are not mere biography. In so far as biography is a table of events, referable to a certain period among successive periods of history, it is only the concern of those who are interested in things that are dead because they are without present power. Blake would have denounced such an interest as mere occupation with vegetable nature. He would have denounced it, too, as being bound by the unrealities of Time and Space, which it is the task of Art (for a reason that he told) to transcend. Not as mere biography, however, but in order completely to see the individuality and its achievement, that are of to-day and not of yesterday, it is necessary to see them with the conditions out of which they arose, and which also they make present.

There is another reason (not truly another but the same reason) why, in order to perceive Blake's achievement, it is proper to see it in association with the plan of his days. "Works of art," he wrote in his *Vision of the Last Judgment*, with that stubborn recognition of actuality to which his vision was joined, "can only be produced in perfection where the man is either in affluence or is above the care of it. Poverty is the fool's rod, which at last is turned on his own back."

"The true Christian Charity," he wrote in his *Laocoon Sayings*, is "not dependent on Money"; but Money, he added immediately, is "the life's

blood of Poor Families." In his own blood he dipped the pen with which he wrote such words. The stain of his struggle marks many of the imperfections of his works. Much of the rapid, unfinished fury of his work was born of the restless energy of his mind ; but much also must certainly have been born of the circumstance that the next task already awaited him before the first was even begun.

For this reason also—for the knowledge that is essential to understanding —it is necessary to learn the plan of Blake's days in contemplating his work, and to see him growing in vision and in skill, discovering how to control some of the implements of his craft even while he learned to control the burning energy of his mind, till he married one control to the other to make the wisdom and the beauty of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, and fought not, nor was angry, but, secure in himself, contentedly, deliberately, put his fame in the keeping of the Master of Eternity.

2

William Blake was born at 28 Broad Street, Carnby Market, London, on the night of November 28th, 1757. His father, James Blake, was a hosier of enough prosperity to allow him ease of life and a limited freedom of purpose. Of his mother, Catherine Blake, little is known. This father and this mother had five children, John, William, James, Catherine and Robert. John was his mother's favourite, went to the bad, enlisted as a soldier, and died young. James succeeded to his father's shop. " He had," says Tatham, " a saving, somniferous mind, lived a yard and half life, pestered his brother, the artist, with timid sentences of bread and cheese advice, got together a little annuity, upon which he supported his only sister, and, vegetating to a moderate age, died about three years before his brother William." Catherine and Robert both lived in William's household at different times; and therefore had a more intimate influence in his life.

It is the commonest fallacy to read back into a man's childhood the qualities he afterwards made conspicuous. Yet it is obvious that in Blake's case these qualities were early conspicuous. This is evident from many touches. He was not, for instance, sent to school, in fear of what that contact might bring. Similarly he was not struck in punishment (as Tatham records) when it was seen how a blow affected him. Long afterwards he exulted grimly over this.

> Thank God ! I never was sent to school
> To be flogg'd into following the style of a fool.
> The errors of a wise man make your rule,
> Rather than the perfections of a fool.

In other ways also it is evident that he very early showed signs of his qualities, and also that these signs received either encouragement or inducement at home.

There is nothing more remarkable in Blake's life than his early familiarity with difficult scriptures not easy at any time to obtain. Among them he found his own way; but the visionary writings of men like Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme are not the ordinary furniture of hosiery houses. No matter what his visionary gift, early evident though that was, no matter how swift his desire to find where the spiritual adventure of others might help him to discover his own secret path, a plain recognition of the ordinary problems of life and knowledge, especially with the lean opportunities of surroundings such as his, makes it clear that a clue came early to his hand to save him much waste in discovery.

It is easy to discover that clue. James Blake the elder, it is reported, was a student of Swedenborg, then in the fullness of his teaching. His son therefore early heard that visionary teaching. That was not all. In 1758, the year after William's birth, Swedenborg had, in his *De Ultimo Judicio*, announced that in the previous year the Last Judgment (a Last Judgment of the sort defined later by Blake himself, of the overthrow of evil and the triumph of good) had transpired in Heaven; that this Last Judgment was reflected in the spirit of Man; with the consequence that a new age was about to begin and the New Jerusalem to appear among men. Unlikely that this was not mentioned in the Blake household. It is worth speculation to consider if the identity of the date of this celestial occurrence with the date of little William's arrival on earth passed without comment.

Later, in 1790, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake set out to overthrow the intellectual system in which Swedenborg expressed his vision. He then referred quite clearly to this identity. "As a new heaven is begun," he wrote, "and it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb" (Blake salutes the seer!): "his writings are the linen clothes folded up" (Blake rejects his intellectual system!).

Swedenborg helped Blake to find himself. There can be no doubt that it was through Swedenborg he sought out Boehme and Paracelsus, and learned to undo words and sentences to find the meanings writers of worth had wrapt in them. But in his own home he heard of Swedenborg, and thus was spared many a baffled quest.

He grew to the habit of accepting his own visions as natural and normal.

When he was only four the little fellow was set screaming to see God put his forehead to the window of his room. Three years later his father, with human inconsistency, began to thrash him for saying how, at Peckham Rye, he had seen a tree full of angels, " their bright wings bespangling the boughs like stars " ; but his mother came between. On another occasion it was the mother who " beat him for running in and saying that he saw the prophet Ezekiel under a tree in the fields." The effect of these blows made the father hesitate to strike him again ; sent the son into a fastness of his own ; and brought distance between the two. One thing for a father to believe in a grave visionary in Sweden : quite another for him to receive a young visionary under his own roof, who even at that age tested the spirits for himself.

Yet his father was discriminating and helpful in matters not always looked on kindly by hosiers. The son was only ten years of age when, says Malkin, " he was put to Mr. Pars' drawing school in the Strand, where he soon attained the art of drawing from casts in plaster of the various antiques." His father also bought him plaster casts of the Gladiator, the Hercules, the Venus of Medici, and models of heads, hands and feet on which to work at home. The son had already, at that age, found " casual occasions of study, by attending sales at Langford's, Christie's and other sale-rooms." His father, therefore, " supplied him with money to buy prints ; when he immediately began his collection, frequenting the shops of the print-dealers, and the sales of the auctioneers. Langford called him his little connoisseur ; and often knocked down to him a cheap lot, with friendly precipitation. He copied Raphael and Michael Angelo, Martin Hemskerck and Albert Dürer, Julio Romano, and the rest of the historic class, neglecting to buy any other prints, however celebrated. His choice was for the most part contemned by his youthful companions, who were accustomed to laugh at what they called his mechanical taste."

These things, if they are testimony to a wisdom not common among fathers, are also testimony to an amazing precocity and force in a son ten years of age. " I am happy," Blake casually remarked in later life, " I cannot say that Raffaelle ever was from my earliest childhood hidden from me. I saw and I knew immediately the difference between Raffaelle and Rubens." He certainly did. About this time, too, he wrote poems, some of which were afterwards published in *Poetical Sketches*, new-made for himself in the Elizabethan mint, now among the most fragrant of the English anthology. Such was he at this time : seeing his own visions, writing his own Elizabethan music in the heyday of the Augustans,

and determinedly buying fifteenth-century prints in London sale-rooms, not to be beguiled by anything of later fame. It is an astonishing prelude to what came later.

3

When he was fourteen his father considered the next step for him, and wished to apprentice him to some eminent painter; but when the son learned how great would be the charge of this on the father's purse, he urged, says Tatham, "that the father would not on any account spend so much money on him, as he thought it would be an injustice to his brothers and sisters." He therefore suggested engraving; and the father decided to apprentice him to Ryland, then engraver to the King, friend of eminent men, and at the highth of his reputation. The father could aim no higher for the son; but the son saw a most unlikely vision. "Father," he said, as the two left Ryland's studio, "I do not like the man's face: it looks as if he will live to be hanged." Nothing could then have seemed more fantastic than such a reading from the scripture of the future; yet twelve years afterwards Ryland committed forgery, and hanged he was.

He was therefore apprenticed to Basire for a premium of fifty guineas—not a mean charge for the father in the money of that time. In Basire's school Blake remained for seven years, and to the last retained, as an engraver, the formal care he learned there; until near the end of his days he returned to his masters of the fifteenth century, and added to that firm care the freedom of Marcantonio and his followers.

After two more years he returned to the pencil. Intrigues against Basire among his pupils touched Blake, and Basire, holding that Blake "was too simple and they too cunning," sent him to make drawings from monuments in Westminster Abbey of which he was commissioned to make engravings. Blake always afterwards remembered this with gratitude. During these hours he acquired a veneration for what he called Gothic art, always used by him as a symbol of freedom and inspiration, even when its style was not distinctly traceable in his own work. In his earliest drawings and paintings, such as *The Penance of Jane Shore* and *King Edward and Queen Eleanor*, the influence of this study is apparent, in treatment and in subject.

His most astonishing work of this time was the engraving, done when sixteen years of age, entitled *Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion*. This he inscribed as "engraved by W. Blake, 1773, from an old Italian drawing: Michael Angelo, Pinxit." At foot he added: "This is One

of the Gothic Artists who built the Cathedrals in what we call the Dark Ages, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins ; of whom the World was not worthy. Such were the Christians in all ages." True, he took the figure from a fresco by Michael Angelo in the Vatican ; but the conception and design are certainly his own ; and the manner of engraving is that which he had learned, and always retained. The visionary power has indisputably his own stamp upon it. The inscription declares that that power (even at that age) had already begun to express itself in a mythological system his latest work, in design and utterance, was not essentially to alter, only to complete, to make more varied and more flexible, and more difficult. Even at this age, the end was in the beginning, the beginning a presage of the end, so intact was that which he had to deliver. This engraving might not unfitly have appeared in *Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion,* the last of his Prophetic Books.

4

Blake's apprenticeship with Basire ended when he was twenty-one ; and he passed to the Antique School of the Royal Academy. The Keeper of the Academy, under whom he now studied, was Moser. The relations between pupil and master (Blake, aged twenty-one, but with determined predilections ; Moser, aged seventy-three) may be discovered in an anecdote he long afterwards scribbled in the margin of his copy of Reynolds' *Discourses.* " I was once looking over the prints from Raffaele and Michael Angelo," he wrote, " in the library of the Royal Academy. Moser came to me and said, ' You should not study those old dry and stiff unfinished works of art. Stay a little and *I* will show you what you should study.' He then went and took down Le Brun and Rubens' *galleries.* How did I secretly rage ! I also spoke my mind ! I said to Moser, ' These things which you call finished are not even begun : how then can they be finished ? ' The man who does not know the beginning cannot know the end of art."

Clearly Moser was not the man to give much assistance to a student who knew so surely from the beginning exactly what he wanted. Yet the sure instinct with which he, from the beginning, so determinedly sought a path he could with certainty tread, can already be discovered for the first time bringing him to the question that troubled him until near the end of his days, often in a vexation that may, to a careful ear, be heard like a contrary voice in the midst of his most positive statements on the goodness and

badness of painting. 'How can that which is not even begun be described as finished?' Even if the older man put words into his younger lips with a definition they might not originally have had, the question, in its essence, was proper enough from him at any moment, even when, as a boy of ten, the "little connoisseur" bought his fifteenth-century prints and would look at nothing later. But at this moment he was beginning his own paintings; he was finding his own practice, to translate into form and colour the pictures that filled his mind; and in these paintings and in that practice the problem is already evident.

Drawing as he did on his own imagination he had need of some exterior aid on which to lean. It was very well for a painter who found his subjects in the visual world to build his pictures in mass and depth, in light and shade, neglecting outline. The outline had, as it were, already been seen; had already framed the subject; and had then been surrendered, as a scaffolding is thrown down when a building is completed. But a painter who looked within himself had need of outline and pattern to sustain that which he made. To such a painter no picture could be said to have been begun until that outline of form and linear pattern of design had been found. For these things he would look by the natural instinct of his mind, to save him from formlessness and ruin, just as he who depends from spiritual intuition looks for precision in the terms he uses, and leaves vagueness to him whose values shift with experience.

Sublimity, the conviction of grandeur, "the light that never was on sea or land": for these things Blake looked. They were the proper idiom of his thought; and he could not find them in the literal representation of the visual world. Therefore by a sure instinct he, from the beginning, turned to Raphael and Michael Angelo, and turned away from Rubens and Rembrandt. He did this without hesitation from the outset. At the very end of his life, in his manuscript notes to Wordsworth he wrote, "Natural objects *always did and do* weaken, deaden and obliterate imagination in me." Yet the problem of a resolution was always present to him, and that problem began to trouble him at the beginning of his painting.

This problem may be seen most clearly in the light of words he wrote long afterwards, when it had fashioned itself before him. "I have now discovered," he wrote to Thomas Butts in 1801, over twenty years later, "that without nature before the painter's eye, he can produce nothing in the walks of natural painting. Historical designing is one thing, and portrait-painting another: and they are as distinct as any two arts can be. Happy would that man be who could unite them!" Almost might these

words have been written of his experience while a student at the Royal Academy. At the Academy he began for the first time to draw from the living model; and at the Academy he began to make his first pictures, all of them from historical subjects, in water-colour and by engraving.

The Penance of Jane Shore, The Ordeal of Queen Emma, The Death of Earl Godwin, are his first work of these days. They were all done under the strong influence of Mortimer, of whom Blake always spoke kindly. There is little in them, for all their careful arrangement and occasional grace, to commend the student who drew them. The escape from natural objects had certainly not as yet liberated his imagination, when he put himself first to school. By a curious irony, liberation first came in a drawing from the living model—no less a model than himself. This is the beautiful engraving now known by the title of *Glad Day,* a copy of which he later finished in colour, in part by hand, in part stamped by a process invented by him.[1] This engraving is dated 1780, and is without doubt the picture evoked in his mind by Romeo's parting words to Juliet:

> Night's candles are burnt out, and Jocund Day
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

It is a miracle of joy, of pure beauty and simple energy of delight. The radiant figure bursts in light and beauty through darkness, and stands exultant, arms outstretched in pure ecstasy of being.

It is interesting to note the origin of this wonderful creation. There is little doubt that the figure was Blake's own, the fruit of his study from the living model at the Academy. The head is the same as his wife's early portrait of him, the limbs the same as his drawing of "William" on Plate 29 of *Milton.* All his life he had no other models than those of his wife and himself. Yet the exultancy of *Glad Day,* done from the living model (the "Natural Object") is that of a liberated imagination; the formalism of *The Penance of Jane Shore* flowed from inward contemplation unrenewed by the freshness of the visual world. This paradox of his natural procedure, at the beginning of his practice, might perhaps have been remembered with advantage by him in later days.

5

Blake was now embarked on his livelihood as an engraver. He seems to have obtained work enough, from booksellers and others, to have justified his choice of a career. The commissions he received between the years

[1] Plate 69.

1779, when he was first employed by the booksellers, and 1787, when his brother Robert died, were sufficient to give him an independent footing on the earth. These years were also full of adventure and discovery, in friendship and in expression as an artist; but the greatest discovery he was to make was the greatest good that may come to any man.

In 1781, when he was in his twenty-fourth year, he loved a lass by the name of Polly Woods, with whom he walked a while. But Polly Woods walked with other lads; and when Blake reproached her, and wished to marry her, "Are you a fool?" she asked. "That," Blake afterwards related, "cured me of jealousy"; but in fact he fell into such a state of wretchedness that his parents sent him to recover at the cottage of a market gardener at Kew by the name of Bouchier. This was in the summer of 1782.

Now Mr. Bouchier had a daughter by the name of Catherine. In her last years she told Tatham that when Blake entered the house she looked on him and swooned, for she knew she had seen her man of men. It is likely the tale is true, for she never looked otherwhere after. What happened in the days that followed is told by Tatham, on her authority. It is not difficult with a little knowledge of life to fill the gaps in her story. William Blake sat with Catherine Bouchier, and talked with her, and told her the unhappy story of Polly Woods. Then Catherine, says Tatham, "expressed her deep sympathy, it is supposed, in such a tender and affectionate manner, that it quite won him. He immediately said, with a suddenness peculiar to him, 'Do you pity me?' 'Yes, indeed I do,' answered she. 'Then I love you,' said he again."

"Such," adds Tatham, with whom she found refuge after Blake's death, "was their courtship." If a man's declared convictions mean anything (Blake was hardly one to build a palace of theory, and not dare to live in it), it was a more fortunate courtship for him than for her, stubbornly though she herself would have resisted such a thought. Those who can only admire what they approve declare that at least his own life was irreproachable, whatever the liberty he proclaimed. It is doubtful if Blake himself would have regarded such a defence with extraordinary enthusiasm. These things, fortunately perhaps, are veiled in their inevitable intimacy. What is not veiled is that but for her constant love, her unshakable faith in him, her quiet courage, and admiring, self-effacing sustainment, the long battle of his life would have been quite other than it was, and would assuredly never have yielded the harvest it did. It is certain that no one knew this better than her husband, as his last recorded words testify.

After this courtship he returned home, and did not see her again for a year. It is said that his parents opposed their marriage. Evidently their instruction for life had been dissimilar, for she made her mark in lieu of signature when she was required to attest the marriage register. After a year, on August 18th, 1782, they married at Battersea, and set up their first home at 23 Green Street, Leicester Fields; now Leicester Square. He now taught her to read and write, to draw and to colour his drawings. Long afterwards he wove their collaboration into *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas*. Chanting the work of Los and Enitharmon, otherwise the Poet-Prophet and his Inspiration, otherwise William and Catherine Blake, he described it thus:

> And first he drew a line upon the walls of shining heaven,
> And Enitharmon tinctured it with beams of blushing love.

6

Blake was in his twenty-fifth year, his wife in her twenty-first, when they began their days together. He was hard at work on journeyman-toil for the booksellers. During their first years of married life he made a number of engravings for them from designs by the painter Stothard, whom he first met through Basire, and with whom he was later to have so mighty a quarrel. Through Stothard he met a man who was to have the greatest influence on his life. This was Flaxman, the sculptor. Eighteen years afterwards, in a letter to Flaxman, he recounted the earthly and spiritual accomplices of his life, in lines that carry his autobiography:—

I bless thee, O Father of Heaven and Earth, that ever I saw Flaxman's face.
Angels stand round my Spirit in Heaven, the blessed of Heaven are my friends upon earth.
When Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given to me for a season,
And now Flaxman hath given me Hayley his friend to be mine, such my lot upon Earth.
Now my lot in the Heavens is this, Milton lov'd me in childhood and shew'd me his face.
Ezra came with Isaah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand,
Paracelsus and Behmen appeared to me, terrors appeared in the Heavens above,
And in Hell beneath, and a mighty and awful change threatened the Earth.

Flaxman stands in Blake's life a pillar of unintelligent friendship. He had lately returned from Italy, had married, and set up house at 27 Wardour Street; and Blake's choice of Green Street for his lodgings was quite possibly instructed by a desire to be near his friend. At near call, also, in Broad Street, lived Fuseli, afterwards Master of the Royal Academy, a wayward

but stubborn genius and friend. Of Fuseli, twenty years later, Blake wrote :—

> The only man I ever knew
> Who did not almost make me spue,
> Was Fuseli . . .

It was Fuseli who announced later that " Blake is damned good to steal from " ; who declared his opinion that " a time will come when Blake's first works will be as much sought after and treasured up in the portfolios of men of mind as those of Michael Angelo now," an accurate prophecy that is testimony to his admiration and perception.

Blake was blessed in his friendships from the beginning ; but among them Flaxman holds a separate place. That particular friendship was to bring much to Blake in temporal matters ; but it struck its roots in deeper soil. The two were drawn to one another by their love of the same manner of art. Flaxman's casts are forgotten, washed away by Time. His designs for Wedgwood, fruit of his love for Greek lucidity of outline, still remain. But a study of his designs for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reveals the mutual indebtedness of these two friends. These were published in 1793. On page after page the imprint of Blake's influence is evident, sufficient at least to account for the charge of " copying " which Blake afterwards laid against him in his notebook. Yet that is but half the picture. Blake was fortified by Flaxman, for he found in him the confirmation of his own need, therefore of his own conviction. Here are the unfaltering outline of form, the lucid linear pattern ; here the rejection of mass and depth, of light and shade falling away into distance ; here the absolute decision of pattern. Flaxman was a sculptor ; and there was much of the sculptor in Blake, an instinct that found expression in his strenuous service of the graver. In Blake a passionate strength and force took these qualities and turned them from statement into power, lifting the defined and definite of Flaxman's uninspired gift into his imagination, transmuting it there, and sending it forth again as incommensurable as all great Art is incommensurable. His debt to Flaxman is therefore not the same as Flaxman's debt to him ; but enough of kinship is evident to suggest that the friendship of these years was knit by something more lasting than mere liking.

Flaxman's first service (perhaps his first disservice) to Blake was to introduce him to the blue-stocking society of Mrs. Mathews' drawing-room. It is odd to think of Blake in that company. It is tragic to think of Catherine Blake there, fresh from her market-gardener's home. Unnecessary to enter into all that has been woven about this episode. Much of it is

probably true. The outcome (if it were the outcome) was certainly in the making when two people, new in marriage, unversed in society, dissimilar in social training, were brought into a drawing-room where the reputed genius was sure to be flattered, cruelly and without meaning, and the market-gardener's daughter as sure to be neglected, just as cruelly and without meaning. It would not be surprising if Blake lost his head. It would not be surprising if his wife became jealous, and withdrew herself. All the rest would follow. Blake's life-long denunciation of jealousy in earthly wives and mythical consorts points to something that became a lasting part of his mind. There is no reason to suppose that his poem *William Bond* may not be plainly read as his version of the episode. If so, then the last two stanzas prove that he learned a beautiful lesson also.

I thought Love lived in the hot sunshine,
But O, he lives in the moony light!
I thought to find Love in the heat of day,
But sweet Love is the comforter of night.

Seek Love in the pity of others' woe,
In the gentle relief of another's care,
In the darkness of night and the winter's snow,
In the naked and outcast, seek Love there!

To have learnt that was worth much; and the only matter of moment in the episode, which is of the past, is that Blake brought from it (as he certainly brought from something of the kind) thoughts and ideas to which he gave unflinching expression in his writings, which are not of the past.

The immediate issue of this meeting was that Mr. Mathews and Flaxman, between them, bore the cost of printing Blake's early poems in a volume entitled *Poetical Sketches: by W. B., London; Printed in the Year* 1783. The book cannot be said to have been published, for the volumes were left on Blake's hands; but no man who has for the first time handled pages of his own creation, and has seen loving admiration from another, can doubt to what new endeavour this experience pricked Blake. There are signs that, during the years that followed the printing of *Poetical Sketches*, Blake was busy writing new Songs, and at least one Prophetic Book.

CHAPTER TWO

YEARS OF CREATION (1784-1800)

I

The succeeding years in Blake's life were full of the fury of creation. They were preceded by great changes in his way of life. In the summer of 1784 his father died; and Blake left Green Street to set up house and business, as printseller and engraver, with an old fellow-apprentice by the name of Parker, at 27 Broad Street, next door to his brother James, who succeeded to his father's business. Here his younger brother Robert came to live with him and help him in his new undertaking.

The fellowship of these two brothers clothed them like a single garment. Robert was the younger by five years, and from his brother he learnt to draw and engrave. Some of his sketches remain to show how strictly he had acquired even his elder brother's gestures. Early in 1787 he died, and during the last fortnight the elder brother watched by him night and day—until the watcher saw the spirit rise from the body, as he described it himself, " clapping his hands for joy." Death did not end that fellowship. All his life, Blake said, Robert came to him; and it was by Robert, he claimed, he was taught a new manner of printing the poems and Prophetic Books on which he was now at work, that their publication might be made possible in a combination of verse, colour and design, according to the ritual and pattern of their creation.

Like many another, before and after him, Blake's hours were packed with labour, because they were divided between taskwork and desire. During the day he worked in his shop, engraving and printing, with his wife (and, while he lived, his apprentice brother) to help him make impressions from his plates. At night he wrote songs, to airs of his own creation, or painted pictures, and experimented how to make colour serve the ends he desired. As yet, he had not found himself in colour. In 1785 he sent four water-colours to the Academy Exhibition, one illustration of Gray, entitled *The Bard,* and three in illustration of the story of Joseph: *Joseph's Brethren Bowing before Him; Joseph making Himself known to His Brethren;* and *Joseph ordering Simeon to be Bound.*[1] These are all that is known of his work up to this time; and they are not distinctive in design or in colour. But the other service of his happier labour of nights had, since the printing of *Poetical Sketches* in 1783, begun to yield a goodly harvest.

[1] The *Joseph* series is now at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

It is clear that the poems of these years were written according to a definite plan. Their title, *Songs of Innocence*, was not an afterthought, though the plan probably took shape as the poems grew in number. Of these four years of Blake's life no record remains to indicate his development; but it is plain that a larger scheme of prophetic, or apocalyptic, books was at this time framed by him, and that he had completed *Tiriel*, the first and least mature of them. In 1787, the year of Robert's death, he was thirty years of age. Fourteen years had passed since, in his engraving of *Joseph of Arimathea*, he had given evidence that the apocalyptic language of his last days was part of the early life of his mind. The eight years that followed were years of rapid execution, bearing in mind the prodigious and exacting physical labour that that execution involved. Therefore it is fairly apparent that these were years of intellectual organisation; that his Songs were part of that organisation; and that in 1787 he was writing books he desired to publish, in order to begin the public utterance of his mind. The problem before him was, how to make that utterance public, how to render his harvest as it ripened? In the light of this problem the action he now took must be considered.

2

In this year of Robert's death he dissolved his partnership with Parker, threw aside the printseller's business at Broad Street, and moved to lodgings in Poland Street. What was the cause of this sudden decision? Disagreement with Parker has been suggested. It is significant that Parker engraved several of Flaxman's designs for the *Odyssey*, published in 1793, and other of Flaxman's designs about this time. Flaxman was Blake's friend. Contemporary records hint that the business of "Parker and Blake" was founded in part with moneys furnished by Flaxman and the Rev. Mr. Mathews. Flaxman's work therefore went to the house in which he was interested; and when Blake left the business he left work Flaxman had sent them.[1]

The truth probably is that Blake now saw his own creative work spread before him, waiting to be published. He was irked by his service of other

[1] This would account for Gilchrist's statement that Blake engraved several plates for the first edition of the *Odyssey*. There is no evidence that he did so; though he engraved three plates for the second edition of the *Iliad*, 1805. But Parker, the remaining partner of the original firm of "Parker and Blake," engraved a number of the *Odyssey* plates at this time, while Flaxman was in Italy. The work therefore went to the firm of which Blake was a partner, no doubt because of Flaxman's friendship with Blake.

men's inventions. He was not content merely to obey the demands of an existing market. He may have wished to print and publish his poems at Broad Street; and Parker would not consent. Two things at least are certain. He was beginning his own original work; and he left the business of "Parker and Blake," into which work was now beginning to come by his friend Flaxman's influence. Certainly it was not the failure of the business that drove him away. Certainly, too, in the light of what was immediately to follow, he was now resolved to live for his own vision, content only to do so much of taskwork as was necessary for him and his wife to live. Flaxman was in Italy. So Blake flung the business aside, and went into lodgings in Poland Street for the service of his vision.

Here, apparently, Robert came to him to instruct him how he might become his own publisher. What avail to write Songs and Prophetic Books if he could not find some way of publishing them? In this difficulty Robert stood before him in vision, and revealed to him how he could himself print his poems and Prophetic Books. He had but to reproduce his page complete, text and design, with some impervious liquid in reverse on a copper plate, and then cause the rest of the plate to be bitten away in a bath of acid. Text and design, instead of being sunk into the plate, as in engraving, would then stand out in relief, as in stereotype, ready to be printed on to paper in any colour he chose, and finished in colour by himself or his wife. From his MS. *The Island in The Moon*, written during 1783–1784, it seems that a method of illuminated engraving for the publication of his books had already tempted his invention. "'I would,'" the MS. reads, "'have all the writing Engraved instead of Printed, at every other leaf a high finished print, all in three Volumes folio, and sell them a hundred pounds apiece. They would print off two thousand.' 'Then,' said she, 'whoever will not have them will be ignorant fools and will not deserve to live.'" These are the very accents of Blake and his wife. The process that was now, as he avows, described to him by Robert was the exact reverse of the process then so hopefully announced. It has in fact all the simplicity and novelty of a revelation, by whomsoever made known, himself or another.

3

In Poland Street he began a long exacting labour, though not till his next change of address was he to find freedom of space and time to bring that labour to fullness. He had written poems, and had other poems to write. He had flung off his business. He was poor indeed; but he was rich in

vision; and he was now free—from all other masters than the Spectre Want. So he began the making of books by the process of relief-etching he described as "Illuminated Printing." "The Author," he says, "has invented a method of Printing both Letterpress and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform and grand than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one-fourth of the expense. If a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet is a phenomenon worthy of public attention, provided that it exceeds in elegance all former methods, the Author is sure of his reward."

In these words the secret of his desire is expressed. He was not content with ordinary publication after his experience with *Poetical Sketches*. He was not content with accepted ways of doing anything. He saw his books complete, and he desired to reproduce what he saw. This could only be done by "a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet." Yet he did expect success; he did believe he should be "sure of his reward." It is recorded that one morning Mrs. Blake went out with a half-crown, the last of their poverty, to buy materials to make the new books, that he might justify before his fellows the faith he had in himself, and earn his reward. Men do not embark on these seas because they expect shipwreck. They do so truly because they must, but they only find necessity tolerable when they expect from it the transfiguration of success.

He seems to have begun in 1788 with two little books entitled *There is no Natural Religion* and *All Religions are One*. Neither of them bears any date. Both are vest-pocket volumes, somewhat rudely done, suggesting that they were first experiments in the new method. But there is nothing tentative about the thought they contain. Whatever the quality of the acid that bit the plate, the sentences that remained in relief bite unforgettably in the mind that reads them. These two books may be the first-fruits of his new invention in printing; but their thought has a ripeness that reveals how the preceding years had been spent.

That thought is the burthen of his Prophetic Books. The next book he made, the following year, was *Songs of Innocence*. It is beautiful in workmanship, beautiful also in thought, wearing the purity and gaiety of a world where evil and experience have not entered. *The Book of Thel* followed in the same year. Here he sings of the fall of a soul from the Eden of innocence into birth to taste of human experience. When these four books are read together, it is evident enough that Blake was working out a scheme complete in his thought, and that he had thrown aside the

printseller's shop to execute that scheme unencumbered by the necessity of spending his days engraving other men's designs.

He had also been reading other men's books. As he had read, he had energetically scored in their margins his approval and disapproval of the things he found in them. Among the books so scored were Swedenborg's. Fortunately he was not content only to write comments upon their margins. His last note in Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom* runs: "Heaven and Hell are born together." From this thought sprang what has justly been called the most pregnant book of the eighteenth century, though it might as justly have been described as one of the most pregnant books of any century, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. "Swedenborg boasts," he exclaims, "that what he writes is new; tho' it is only the Contents or Index of already publish'd books."

> Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falsehoods.
>
> And now hear the reason. He conversed with Angels who are all religious, and conversed not with Devils, who all hate religion, for he was incapable thro' his conceited notions.
>
> Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime—but no further.
>
> Have now another plain fact. Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal worth with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespear an infinite number.
>
> But when he had done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine.

Thus he saluted Swedenborg, even as he left him. Into *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which he next printed, in 1789 or 1790 (it is undated), he put as much of himself, in as manifest a form, as he succeeded in bringing within the covers of any book. Apart from the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which have sung their way to memory, it is therefore the most familiar of any of his books. Yet, without Swedenborg *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* would not have been written.

4

The years between 1790 and 1795 were full of labour. Within these years he produced all his earlier Prophetic Books. In these early books

the personages of his eternal drama took form and became familiar to him, new personages appearing as their places were found for them, old personages passing away when they were no longer needed. In 1791 or 1792 appeared *The Song of Liberty*. This is usually found in the one volume with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In it Blake is seen looking to find in the revolutions that troubled the earth an echo of events transpiring in the heavens. In 1793 he moved to a more spacious house, and was better able to print his volumes. In that year appeared the *Vision of the Daughters of Albion*, by way of sequel to the *Book of Thel*, and *America : A Prophecy*, to follow the thought of *The Song of Liberty ;* succeeded the next year by *Europe : A Prophecy*. In 1794, together with *Europe*, appeared the *Songs of Experience*, a sequel to the *Songs of Innocence*, and *The First Book of Urizen*. In 1795 appeared *The Song of Los*, *The Book of Los* and *The Book of Ahania*.

All these were produced by his invention of Illuminated Printing. In 1792 he also engraved two small volumes from his own designs, accompanied by his own text. These were entitled *The History of England* and *For Children : The Gates of Paradise*. The first of these has disappeared. The engravings of the second, with the verses included in the book, remain among Blake's best and most characteristic work.

The poem *Tiriel*, usually ascribed to this period, is work of an earlier period. Though he made twelve illustrations[1] for it in Indian ink, Blake evidently did not think it worth reproducing by his new process. He left it lying in MS. The reason is plain enough. Its personages no longer belonged to the life of his mind. They, and their story, belong to an earlier period ; they have little part in the new mythological system now being created, illuminated and printed by the new process. The style lacks the energy and exuberance of Blake's work during this period. It suggests work done in the years following *Poetical Sketches* in 1783. The drawings themselves are formal in character, and lack the energy of the drawings done after he left Broad Street. They, too, look back rather to the water-colour drawings of the *Joseph* series and *The Bard* than with fellowship on the movement and strength of his creation during this later period.[2]

Perhaps it was because he had failed to find a publisher for this early poem that Robert came to help him in his difficulty, giving him new hope, and enormous joy in creation. Certainly the catalogue of these years

[1] The best of these is reproduced on Plate 94.

[2] The grey paper on which *Tiriel* was written is the same, with the same watermark, as that on which he wrote *The Island in the Moon*, sometime about 1784.

constitutes a prodigious output. Many of the books printed at this time must have been written within these years, in the intervals of engraving for a livelihood. They are the fruit of a mythological system that can be seen organising itself, taking on new developments (without essential change) even while he worked. That was enough, of itself, to trammel Blake's hurrying feet. He was moving in mysterious worlds, among persons dark and strange, whose relations to one another had to be perfectly discovered before they could be announced to mankind. Abysms and chasms, dizzy highths and yawning depths, echoing with wailing winds and dark with stellar catastrophes, do not constitute a world through which the spirit may incontinently speed, however native the climate be to its inclination.

Moreover, each book, besides being decorated, was fully illustrated. The personages who lived in the terrific worlds searched by his imagination, he dared to show in fashion as they moved, leaping across his pages as they leapt through bright ether, or sitting in monstrous sorrow as they mourned. These illustrations were first drawn in rough sketches, some of which remain. A few were done in complete pictures. However done, they had then to be transferred, with the complete text, in reverse on copper, before the process of Illuminated Printing could begin. The labour of this may be considered. Even had his books been printed and published in the ordinary way, his work during these years would have been enough for most men. With all that it meant of sheer physical labour, over and above the intellectual energy involved, the work of these years is a matter for wonder.

Throughout, his wife worked with him, and sustained him. She worked with him by day, and also by night. By day, she helped him with the printing, and coloured his outlines under his direction. But it is recorded that often, in the middle of the night, he would rise up, saying that lines had been given him to write. Then she would rise up too, and sit patiently and quietly at his side for hours, holding his hand to soothe and calm him, while in a frenzy of imagination he wrote page after page.

5

Out of this labour he made a new discovery. He had been apprentice to others, with measured profit. He now became apprentice to himself, with extraordinary profit. It is astonishing, when one considers it, that to this time he had done practically nothing in the way of painting by which he is now remembered. Only on two engravings (*Joseph of Arimathea*, done when sixteen, and *Glad Day*, done when twenty-three) and on

some drawings in Indian ink, had his hand been indisputably placed. Now, while he made his Illuminated Books, he found three jewels of worth. He found the habitual exercise of his imagination in the making of pictures. He found the use of colour, in a form suitable to his desire. He found that such colour, when stamped on paper by his printing press, gave curious, quite remarkable results. All of these discoveries he turned to the making of a new kind of picture.

Only one example remains to show that Blake ever used oil-colour. Tatham states that about the time *Poetical Sketches* was published " Blake took to painting." He adds that " oil painting was recommended to him as the only medium through which breadth, force and sufficient rapidity could be obtained. He made several attempts, and found himself quite unequal to the management of it. His great objections were that the picture, after it was painted, sunk so much that it ceased to retain the brilliancy and luxury that he intended, and also that no definite line, no positive end to the form could, even with the greatest ingenuity, be obtained: all his lines dwindled and his clearness melted." These are words that ring true to Blake's mind, and so declare their authority. He adds: " From these circumstances it harassed him; he grew impatient and rebellious, and flung it aside, tired with ill-success and tormented with doubts." In these words the barrenness of the preceding years is revealed. Blake had sought for a medium to express himself in colour, conformably with his instinct for outline and pattern; he had grown " tired with ill-success and tormented with doubts "; he had been compelled to content himself with water-colours and Indian ink, with engraving for an alternative.

Nearly twenty years later, in his *Descriptive Catalogue*, 1809, Blake wrote his own mind on the matter. " Oil," he then wrote, " has falsely been supposed to give strength to colours: but a little consideration must show the fallacy of this opinion. Oil will not drink or absorb colour enough to stand the test of very little time and of the air. It deadens every colour it is mixed with, at its first mixture, and in a little time becomes a yellow mask over all that it touches. Let the works of modern Artists since Reubens' time witness the villainy of someone at that time, who first brought Oil Painting into general opinion and practice: since which we have never had a picture painted that could show itself by the side of an earlier production." Later in the same note he adds: " All Frescoes are as high-finished as miniatures or enamels, and they are known to be unchangeable. . . . All the genuine old little Pictures, called Cabinet

Pictures, are in fresco and not in oil. Oil was not used, except by blundering ignorance, till after Vandyke's time; but the art of fresco-painting being lost, oil became a fetter to genius and a dungeon to art."

Certainly, by the witness of his barrenness, oil appeared to have been a fetter to Blake's genius and a dungeon to his art. As he said in the *Catalogue*, "the Venetian and Flemish practice is broken lines, broken masses, and broken colours"; his "practice is unbroken lines, unbroken masses, and unbroken colours. Their art is to lose form; his art is to find form, and to keep it. His arts are opposite to theirs in all things." Now while printing his Illuminated Books, the necessity of his process compelled him to hold firmly to his ideal of unbroken lines, masses and colour; compelled him also to mix his own colours to achieve the ends he desired. Thus he struck a method of tempera-painting, boldly described as fresco, and was liberated from the barrenness, the dungeon of torment, into which he had fallen.

To use the clear colours he required for his Illuminated Printing, and mixed for that purpose, for the painting of pictures, he took a canvas, or a panel, or even a plate of copper, and covered it, says Tatham, "with three or four layers of whitening and carpenter's glue." On this prepared surface he applied his pigment, mixed, not as in true tempera-painting with yolk of egg, but with a solution of glue. He then "washed his pictures over with glue, in the manner of a varnish." So (original in all things) he painted all his future pictures, when he did not use water-colour.

He began this method of tempera-painting in 1790. *The Flight into Egypt* and *Christ Blessing Little Children* are both painted in this manner, and bear this date. He did not excellently manage his mixture, for in both these pictures the paint has cracked and peeled with time. Later he used copper with even more disastrous results, as in *The Nativity* and *Eve Tempted by the Serpent*. He apparently did not realise that copper expands and contracts with heat and cold with surprising sympathy. Therefore these paintings have given great trouble in restoration and require delicate handling. But the effect of this new method of tempera-painting was that he began now to experiment in depth, mass and distance, searching for himself among the graces he had so energetically denounced, to find if they would serve his desire.[1]

[1] It is a just duty to acknowledge here the service done by the late Stanley William Littlejohn in the restoration of some of Blake's tempera-paintings that have suffered most in this way. He was killed in action in France in September, 1917.

6

So he came to his other discovery. Not for another five years were the printing of his new books and the painting of his new pictures to bring him to this. By that time great changes had come into his life. He had moved into a new house. The entire plan of his life was re-cast. Without these changes, and the larger freedom of time and household space they brought, he could not have undertaken the printing of his Prophetic Books at the speed with which they appeared between 1793 and 1796. Hardly could he then have made the discovery these printed books put into his hands. His lodgings at Poland Street, by his own later confession, would not have given him what he wanted. But the new discovery, though it was not to occur for another five years, is part of the development of mind and practice that began with the determination to leave Broad Street and to live his own creative life, led to the invention of Illuminated Printing, passed on to experiments in tempera-painting, and so brought him to a combination both of his new printing and his new painting. His development during these years is a complete whole; and must be seen as such. The pattern of his life in the meantime is the tragic undersong of that development.

In his Illuminated Printing his process had been to print, or stamp, his pictures from metal plates on paper, then by hand to colour the outlines so made. It was but a step from this to what, for the lack of a better name, have been called his Colour-printed Drawings. For these drawings he used the same medium as in the tempera-painting he had begun; but, instead of painting directly on canvas, panel or copper, he first made his design in reverse on a thick millboard, from which he stamped it on paper. On the millboard he applied his colours, mixed with varnish and glue, and in a series of impressions he stamped these again upon his paper, using a system of cross lines for identity of register. At first he seems to have stamped his colours from the millboard in this way only when he desired masses of colour, depth and conglomeration, leaving the more delicate parts blank, to be finished by hand, as he filled with colour the designs made by his process of Illuminated Printing. This is clearly his method in *Glad Day*, for example; but in *Nebuchadnezzar* he seems to have stamped the greater part, if not all, of the colour from the millboard, and worked up the whole picture afterwards by hand.

Between these two, at the two ends of his scale, lies a great variety of method, comprising a wonderful series of pictures that contains his greatest

acts of imagination. Never did he rise higher, with so composed and so controlled a flight, than in the august grandeur of *The Elohim Creating Adam* (that challenges comparison with Michael Angelo's *Creation*), in the beauty of *Pity*, the mystery of *Hecate*, the terror and awe of *The Lazar House*, the pure joy, full of light, of *Glad Day*, the wizard grace of *Satan Exulting over Eve*, the horror of *Nebuchadnezzar*, the fiery majesty of *Elijah in the Chariot*. Every emotion, every quality of imaginative daring, is searched in this series of Colour-printed Drawings, almost invariably with the effortless ease of mastery. Records of some fifteen or sixteen of them remain. Some of these are lost. Those that remain form a series that would place their maker among the greatest artists, even if no other of his works had survived. They would do more than this. They would put him among the few creators whose works haunt the memory because they throw light into strange places of elemental being, troubling unsuspected depths and unfolding half-forgotten powers of urgent majesty, beauty and strength. These drawings do all this, yet do it without strain, as though their maker moved through scenes naturally frequented by him.

The series reveals every degree of experiment in this new method of making pictures. It does not necessarily follow that the drawings on which the millboard was least used went before those on which it was used most freely. The two ends of the scale may have been worked together. The stages of experiment may have overlapped. Yet there is a definite scale to be noticed; and it seems likely that this scale corresponds with advancing experiment, particularly as a clue for the discovery of Colour-printed Drawing can be found in the invention of Illuminated Printing.

The *Book of Thel* was printed as early as 1789. A separate print of Plate 4 of this exists[1] where the colour was obviously stamped on the paper, probably from a millboard after the book was printed. The washes of colour around the figures, on the earth and about the sky, have just the granulated, mottled effect of the colour left on the Colour-printed Drawings when the moist millboard was pulled away from the dry paper on which it had been pressed. It cannot be said when this separate print was made; but it was probably before the later drawings. Similarly there is a separate print of Plate 2 of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) where the same effects appear. The rays of colour across the sky in that print have the same reticulations, and are strikingly like the rays of colour around the figure of *Glad Day*. In *The Song of Los*, 1795 (the year of the Colour-

[1] This is in the British Museum.

printed Drawings), the colour was obviously printed from millboard on the pages of the book itself.

In all these instances the millboard was used only for the surrounding colour. The figures were left blank, to be coloured by brush. It seems natural, therefore, to suppose that he began his Colour-printed Drawings with this method, and afterwards experimented with the millboard for every part of the picture, working over the wet colour with his brush where that was required. He seems to have been fascinated with the curious mottled appearance of his colour when he had pulled away the millboard. It gave him results that could not have been obtained in any other way. There was much of chance in these effects ; but they were not quite the hazard they seem to be. Practice guided him in obtaining his effects, until he was able to measure the consequences with nicety of skill. The ass in *Hecate*, the remarkable rock on which Newton sits, even the sea of *The Good and Evil Angels*, are a combination of foresight, measure and hazard. They yielded him the joint pleasure of the expected and the unexpected, the foreseen and unforeseen. But the reticulations on the shoulder of Nebuchadnezzar are obviously a nicely calculated effect that could only have come after practice with quantity of colour and degree of pressure.

Probably he began, by way of experiment, with his old engraving *Glad Day*. Here it is apparent that he left the figure to be coloured more delicately by brush, blotting out with masses of mixed colour from the millboard the caterpillar and moth that appear, in the original engraving, beneath the feet of the figure. In colouring the figure he altered the head a little. To this end of the scale belong a number of others. In *Elijah in the Chariot of Fire* the figures and the chariot are outlined in Indian ink, as they would have been if printed. In *The Good and Evil Angels*, a design taken from Plate 4 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the figures and much else were left blank to be finished by hand, the surrounding masses of colour having been stamped from the millboard. In the superb *Elohim Creating Adam* the outline seems only to have been stamped, for the colouration consists mostly of delicate brushwork, the brush being used almost like a pencil. In *The Lazar House* and *Satan Exulting over Eve* the brush is also freely used. At the other end of the scale lie *Pity*, *Newton*, *Hecate* and *Nebuchadnezzar*. In these most of the colour seems to have been transferred from the millboard, even for the moulding of the flesh. Blake seemed by this time to know what to expect with confidence from the millboard, and used his brush only in rapid work on

the wet paint, with occasional penwork on the dry picture to relieve the colour.

The entire series seems to have been printed within the space of one year. *Glad Day* bears no date; but *Elijah in the Chariot of Fire*, with its stamped outline in Indian ink, filled with colour, was certainly one of his early prints, and it is dated 1795. *Nebuchadnezzar*, with its moulded flesh stamped from the millboard with practised decision, and left so, is dated 1795. *The Song of Los* is dated 1795. Not till that year do his Illuminated Printing and his tempera-painting seem to have brought him to this new invention for the making of pictures. Within that year he produced a wonderful series of pictures, hardly to be surpassed for imaginative daring or controlled accomplishment. After that year he never again produced another Colour-printed Drawing. The invention was searched to the full; and yielded astonishing results. It was then dropped decisively and finally. Why was this?

Two reasons suggest themselves. One is that he seems to have expected, by this invention, to be able to reproduce further copies of each picture even as, by his invention of Illuminated Printing, he was able to reproduce further copies of his books. At least three copies exist of *The Lazar House*, and two each of *Hecate* and *Nebuchadnezzar*. But the later copies, as might be expected, are found to have lost, with the renewed use of the millboard, the freshness and quality of the original. Especially is this the case with *Hecate* and *Nebuchadnezzar*, where the millboard was more freely used. In the later copies of *The Lazar House*, where the millboard was used mainly for the original outline, subsequent brushwork became more necessary; and in one of these copies he does not seem to have troubled to fill in the darts "triumphant Death shook" from each side of the scroll it holds. The elaborate, detailed toil of this method hardly justified itself if only one clear copy could be produced, since that result could be attained more quickly by direct painting. The parallel of the printed books, as a reproductive process, did not justify itself.

There is another reason, more immediate and also more tragic. In 1795, when he made these drawings, he had a house of his own. For the only period of his life he had freedom of space, where he could print copies of his books in hope of future sale, and could leave his moist drawings to dry between the stages of impressing different colours upon them, before books and drawings required to be finished by hand. That freedom never again came to him. In the year he made these Colour-printed Drawings he took a sore decision of the greatest consequence to his life; and

after 1795 neither was he able (even had he desired) to return to this method of printing drawings nor did he print a single further copy of any of his books until he had found a purchaser for it.

7

Little wonder that during these years Blake should have begun to consider that he was inspired. Since he had left Broad Street in 1787 he seems to have been carried into another world, the wonders of which had opened within him. No man can give but what he has, or has been given to him; and he had himself already written, " The Desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite, and himself Infinite." It is not surprising that he himself should begin to think what those who look on his work of this period must also think, for the beauty that a man makes is always more magical to him than it will appear to others. Inspiration, however (whatever it be), furnishes no table. His books and his pictures, which were to have brought him success, did not find buyers. Far from " printing off two thousand," and " selling them a hundred pounds apiece," he printed very few of each of his books, and they and his pictures remained on his hands. His only audience was his wife. His removal from Broad Street to Poland Street had brought him failure and want.

From other labour, during these years, a livelihood had to be earned. Flaxman having been " taken to Italy," " Fuseli was given to him for a season." In 1790 or 1791 Fuseli introduced him to Johnson, a bookseller and publisher in St. Paul's Churchyard. For Johnson, Blake then began to work, not only to engrave, but to design plates for himself to engrave. As part of this new collaboration Johnson agreed to publish his poem *The French Revolution*. This was announced on the title-page as " a Poem in Seven Books," of which only the first was published, at the price of one shilling. The *Advertisement* stated that " the remaining Books of this Poem are finished, and will be published in their Order." At that time the King of France had been arrested, and the new Constitution had not been, or had only just been, voted; and this First Book brought the action to the taking of the Bastille two years before. No further books were printed; and the publication of this uncompleted instalment passed without notice by the public, by reviewers, even by the Catalogue of the British Museum. The moment was hardly propitious for contemporary poems of this character; and when Blake later lifted the matter into the

Prophetic Books he was able to look on the events of which it told from another plane.

At Johnson's shop he met revolutionary company. In the same year as *The French Revolution* was published, Johnson published Mary Woolstoncraft's *Rights of Women;* and he engaged Blake to make and engrave designs for a volume of *Tales for Children* translated by her from the German. Among others who gathered at Johnson's shop were Godwin and Tom Paine. To this company Blake was a disconcerting addition: but, as the event showed, a sagacious one. They exalted Reason, which to him was death and barrenness and the sign of Fallen Man. He exalted Jesus Christ as the Poet-Prophet-Saviour sent to men; and though he did not exalt Him exactly as the creeds taught, his profession went strangely in that company. What they declared, however, he believed; and whatever he thought worthy to believe he judged excellent to practise. Therefore, in 1791, when Godwin was at work on his *Political Justice,* when Mary Woolstoncraft had published her *Rights of Women,* and Tom Paine the first part of his *Rights of Man,* while all England raged in mingled terror and astonishment at the events in France, the author of *The French Revolution* did not hesitate to stride down to the shop in St. Paul's Churchyard with a red cap on his head. Nevertheless, the following year, while Tom Paine was recounting for the benefit of the company a fierce public oration he had delivered the previous night, Blake listened to him; looked intently on him; then went to him and, putting his hands on his shoulders, told him on no account to return home, but to make his way straight for France. The following day, while officers were looking for Tom Paine in his house, he was on his way to Dover; and when the order came to Dover to hold him, he was on the waters for France, never to return to England.

In 1793 Blake moved from Poland Street to 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth; and one of the first of his Illuminated Books that bears the inscription of the new address is *America: A Prophecy.* Between this and *The French Revolution* lies the distance, literally, between heaven and earth. *The French Revolution* had been a plain recital, with passages of large and splendid picture, of the events in France. Since then Blake had written *A Song of Liberty,* in which, looking over history, he had found that "Everything that lives is Holy!" In *America,* therefore, and in *Europe* to follow, he saw the revolutions that were shaking the earth as part of his huge symbol of the life of Man, a life lived in the heavens, where its energies and qualities warred against one another seeking to find the

peace that could only come by the resolution of a Last Judgment. Into that heavenly tumult, therefore, he lifted the earthly happenings. " Every natural event has a spiritual cause," he declared ; and he saw these earthly events as the work of the spirit of Revolt, child of Prophecy and Inspiration, whose task must be completed before true spiritual freedom and harmony can be enjoyed. So he stayed by his vision, which was more than a red cap to adorn the defiant brow. In his first republican ardour he had planned an essay on " The Cruelties used by Kings and Priests." He never wrote that essay. He put all the matter it might have contained into the symbolism of his Prophetic Books.

8

At Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, Blake entered into the fullness of his powers. Here he produced most of his Illuminated Books. Here he produced his Colour-printed Drawings. Here he enjoyed, for the first time, a measure of comfort. The house in which he lived, says Tatham, was " a pretty, clean house of eight or ten rooms." " At first they kept a servant, but finding (as Mrs. Blake declared, and as everyone else knows) the more service the more inconvenience, she, like all sensible women who are possessed of industry and health, and only moderate means, relinquished this incessant tax upon domestic comfort, did all the work herself, kept the house clean and tidy, besides printing all Blake's numerous engravings, which was a task alone sufficient for any industrious woman."

By way of more than passing interest, it is worthy of note that in the garden of the house grew a grape-vine ; but no grapes were enjoyed, for Blake held that it was wrong to prune the vine. Had Blake submitted that vine to pruning, he might have enjoyed its fruit ; and had he submitted the luxuriant vine of his Prophetic Books to diligent pruning, more people might have lived to enjoy their fruit also. It would be one of those strange chances with which Life is for ever teasing the children of men, that Blake should produce the larger number of his books in a house from the windows of which he could see a parable from which he was not willing to learn.

What brought this unexpected turn in Blake's fortunes? In the sketch-book, which he had begun to use for notes and drawings (known as the Rossetti MS.) a strange note appears. It runs : " I say I shan't live five years. And if I live one it will be a Wonder. June, 1793." When he wrote that note, he was already at Lambeth ; for *The Gates of Paradise* is dated

from there in May. Blake was subject to periods of deep depression; but he was not likely to put this note on record without cause, at a moment when he had found unexpected comfort, and had entered what was for him a new way of life.

The reason would appear to be obvious, that the six years of poverty and incessant toil in Poland Street had broken his health. Friends had come to his help, and found him pupils to whom to teach drawing. It was Flaxman's practice to take pupils; but Flaxman was now in Italy. It may be that he referred some of his pupils to Blake. Or perhaps it was Fuseli who found pupils for him. Certainly, "he was engaged for that purpose," says Tatham, "by some families of high rank." He went to their homes for this purpose; "and was found so entertaining and pleasant, possessing such novel thoughts and such eccentric notions, together with such jocose hilarity and amiable demeanour, that he frequently found himself asked to stay for dinner, and spend the evening in the same interesting and lively manner in which he had consumed the morning. Thus he stopped whole days from his work at home; but nevertheless he continued teaching."

Thus he became, while at Lambeth, says Tatham (with Mrs. Blake at his elbow), "even in person, although far from gross, round and comfortable, and at one time nearly what may be called portly." From Tatham's figures it is apparent that he was in no want; and it is characteristic of him that he should have used his comparative comfort to help others, more liberally than wisely. The mere sight of a young man passing the house daily with a portfolio under his arm, was enough for him to bring the young man into the house, and to help him with money and instruction. When the young man fell ill, Blake and his wife nursed him, and cared for him, until he died. Another time, says Tatham, it was "a certain free-thinking speculator, the author of many elaborate philosophical treatises," who "said that his children had not a dinner." "Blake lent him £40, nearly all that he had at that time by him, and had the mortification upon calling upon him on the following Sunday, to find that his wife, who was a dressy and what is called a pretty woman, had squandered some large portion of the money upon her worthless sides."

These are signs that the days of want had ended for awhile. During the next three years, therefore, he gathered the harvest of his imagination freely. In October, 1793, he made his first appeal to the public, on a sheet printed by himself. It runs as follows:—

October 10, 1793.

TO THE PUBLIC

The labours of the Artist, the Poet, the Musician, have been proverbially attended by poverty and obscurity; this was never the fault of the Public, but was owing to a neglect of means to propagate such works as have wholly absorbed the Man of Genius. Even Milton and Shakespeare could not publish their own works. This difficulty has been obviated by the Author of the following productions now presented to the Public; who has invented a method of Printing both Letterpress and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform and grand than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one-fourth of the expense.

If a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet is a phenomenon worthy of public attention, provided that it exceeds in elegance all former methods, the Author is sure of his reward.

Mr. Blake's powers of invention very early engaged the attention of many persons of eminence and fortune; by whose means he has been regularly enabled to bring before the Public works (he is not afraid to say) of equal magnitude and consequence with the productions of any age or country; among which are two large highly finished engravings (and two more are nearly ready) which will commence a Series of subjects from the Bible and another from the History of England.

The following are the subjects of the several works now published and on sale at Mr. Blake's, No. 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth.

1. *Job*, a Historical Engraving. Size, 1 ft. $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 1 ft. 2 in. Price 12^{s}.

2. *Edward and Elinor*, a Historical Engraving. Size, 1 ft. $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 1 ft. Price 10^{s} 6^{d}.

3. *America: a Prophecy*, in Illuminated Printing. Folio, with 18 designs. Price 10^{s} 6^{d}.

4. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, in Illuminated Printing. Folio, with 8 designs. Price 7^{s} 6^{d}.

5. *The Book of Thel*, a poem in Illuminated Printing. Quarto, with 6 designs. Price 3^{s}.

6. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in Illuminated Printing. Quarto, with 14 designs. Price 7^{s} 6^{d}.

7. *Songs of Innocence*, in Illuminated Printing. Octavo, with 25 designs. Price 5^{s}.

8. *Songs of Experience*, in Illuminated Printing. Octavo, with 25 designs. Price 5^{s}.

9. *The History of England,* a small book of Engravings. Price 3^{s}.

10. *The Gates of Paradise,* a small book of Engravings. Price 3^{s}.

The Illuminated Books are Printed in Colours, and on the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured.

No Subscriptions for the numerous great works now in hand are asked, for none are wanted ; but the Author will produce his works, and offer them for sale at a fair price.

This Prospectus, though addressed to the public, could only have reached the hands of his pupils, and the customers at Johnson's shop. But those pupils were now to be peremptorily discarded. " A remarkable effort and kind flirt of fortune," says Tatham, " brought this mode of livelihood to an inevitable close." Unquestionably, the effort was remarkable. Blake now found himself recommended to an appointment as tutor to the Royal Family. It is not surprising that Tatham should record that " Blake stood aghast." He makes haste to add that Blake's revulsion was " not from any republican humours, not from any disaffection to his superiors, but because he would have been drawn into a class of society superior to his previous pursuits and habits ; he would have been expected to have lived in comparative respectability, not to say splendour—a mode of life, as he thought, derogatory to the simplicity of his designs and deportment. He had, again, as about oil painting, Michael Angelo on his side, who, though rich, preferred living as a poor man, the habits of whom, it must be confessed, are the most conducive to study and application."

One would like to see Blake reading some of these sentences. Yet the essence of the matter is there. Even the reference to Michael Angelo has a ring of authenticity. Blake saw (as once before he had seen, and as he was again to see) the whole meaning of his life suddenly threatened. Tatham gives no date for the offer ; but the circumstances of his life place it definitely as somewhere in the year 1795, when he was at work upon his Colour-printed Drawings. *The Elohim Creating Adam* stood before him, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* stood behind him, the Royal Family tempted him ; and Blake did not hesitate. " His friends ridiculed and blamed him by turns," says Tatham ; but Blake declined the offer. More than that, he surrendered all his pupils ; he forswore in its entirety the path that could lead to such an end ; and he returned to his own work, to want and to toil.

What this decision meant to him may be discovered in a letter written in the last months of his life, in which he refers to his habit of work while at Hercules Buildings. The letter is dated 12 April, 1827, four months before his death. It was written to his old friend George Cumberland, apparently in answer to an enquiry for copies of his Illuminated Books. "Having none remaining of all that I had Printed I cannot Print more except at a great loss," he wrote. "For at the time I printed those things I had a whole house to range in. Now I am shut up in a Corner, therefore I am forced to ask a price for them that I can scarce expect to get from a stranger. I am now printing a set of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* for a Friend at 10 guineas, which I cannot do under six months consistent with my other work, so that I have little hope of doing any more of such things." From this it is clear that the books he sold in later years were printed while he was at Hercules Buildings, because he "had a whole house to range in"; and that after he left Hercules Buildings he printed no more books until he had found a customer for each copy he made. He made plates of other books. That was a different matter. It did not require so much of space or of time as demanded by the labour of printing and colouring the printed copies. To this freedom of space and time (but particularly to the freedom of space, as his words clearly imply) his Illuminated Printing and Colour-printed Drawings were due; and to these his decision spelt an end, though that did not at once appear.

9

This was in 1795; and it is perhaps significant of a lean outlook that the two Illuminated Books he printed this year (*The Book of Los* and *The Book of Ahania*, the last of the first series) are altogether different from those he had made in preceding years. The others had been written in a bold hand, fully decorated and illustrated. These two books are written in a thin cursive script, without decorations or illustrations except headpiece and tailpiece. Not here is to be found the "style more ornamental, uniform and grand than any before discovered." Disillusionment had come. Restriction had come. The public he had so bravely addressed two years before, had no need of his "powers of invention."

He returned, therefore, to his journeyman's toil for the booksellers. For over two years he had been free of that necessity. Now he went back to it, with none to buy his books, none to buy his pictures, yet, despite the entreaty of his friends, firmly declining to be tutor to the Royal Family.

Those friends thought him ridiculous; and posterity (now that he has justified his faith) finds him heroic; but these are merely words. Along one road he saw the certain end of the meaning of his life, that which gave it value in his eyes. Along the other he saw that meaning at least preserved, and perhaps even at last justified; and he took the second, and kept, not simply his faith, but himself. If, he sang,

> If the Sun and Moon should doubt,
> They'd immediately go out;

and it was against that going-out he defended himself.

He did not delay in searching for work. That year, or early in 1796, he was engaged by Edwards, a bookseller of New Bond Street, to illustrate a sumptuous edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*. In the autumn of 1797 the edition began publication in parts; but it did not sell. Publication stopped with the first part, carrying the poem to the end of *Night the Fourth*, and containing ninety-five pages and forty-three large plate designs engraved by Blake. These forty-three plates meant the greater part of a year's work for Blake; and for them he received, it is said, a pittance of a guinea a plate. It was, at any rate, a wage that stirred his friends, Flaxman and Fuseli, to anger. The wage was even more monstrous than it seems; for Blake made a complete set of no less than five hundred and thirty-seven water-colour drawings for Edwards.[1]

It is not surprising that the quality of the work in these engravings should be unequal. The drawings were all marginal illustrations. It was therefore necessary for Blake to keep closely to the text; and the text was not apt to stimulate imagination. When Blake was most freely himself, Young would probably have been most startled and astonished; for in some of the plates the terrific power of Blake's imagination is suddenly unveiled, across others a swift grace passes. Then imagination dies, and falls almost to the level of the verse, until once more Blake, working rapidly for his master, remembers himself and forgets Young. Yet neither one mood nor the other pleased the public. The book failed, and seems for awhile to have buried Blake. About the same time as he made these designs for Young he made a similar set for Gray's *Poems*. The illustrations for Gray strongly recall those for Young; but they are cruder in conception and less finished in execution. They may have been intended to follow Young;

[1] These drawings are now in the possession of W. A. White, Esq., of Brooklyn, U.S.A., who has courteously furnished photographic reproductions of certain of them, on which Blake has marked in pencil the lines to which he intended his illustrations to refer.

but with the failure of *Night Thoughts* they never found a publisher. They were afterwards presented to Mrs. Flaxman.

All that his labour on *Night Thoughts* left him was to give him the form for a new poem, in which the symbolic drama of the entire spiritual life of Man was to be the action. Seven years before, he had closed *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* with the announcement, " I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no." In 1794 he printed a book entitled *The First Book of Urizen*, giving warning of a second that never appeared. About this time he made a drawing in his notebook for the title-page of a book entitled *The Bible of Hell, in Nocturnal Visions Collected.* Vol. I. Lambeth. No such Bible is known ; but in 1797, the year when his edition of *Night Thoughts* appeared, he began to write out the copy of a new poem entitled *Vala.* This was planned in the manner of Young's poem, in nine " Nights," or " Nocturnal Visions " ; and it dealt with the fuller story of Urizen, whose adventures show some curious correspondences with Satan's journey through space in *Paradise Lost.* Apparently, therefore, *Vala* was to be the *Bible of Hell* and also *The Second Book of Urizen ;* and Young's poem gave him the form for it, the successive Nights of the Fall being set out by contrast against the successive Days of Creation. To complete the correspondence he wrote a clean copy of the new poem on engraved, unprinted proof-sheets of the *Night Thoughts,* writing the lines in the space left for the printing of Young's poem. *Vala* was never published, or printed ; and the MS. was destined for further adventures.

10

Blake himself has left in record how disastrous the failure of *Night Thoughts* was to his fortunes. Two years afterwards, in August, 1799, he is found writing to George Cumberland, " As to myself . . . I live by miracle. I am painting small pictures from the Bible. For as to engraving, in which art I cannot reproach myself with any neglect, yet I am laid by in a corner as if I did not exist, and since my Young's *Night Thoughts* have been published, even Johnson and Fuseli have discarded my graver. But as I know that he who works and has his health cannot starve, I laugh at fortune, and go on and on. I think I foresee better things than I have ever seen. My work pleases my employer, and I have an order for fifty small pictures at one guinea each, which is something better than mere copying after another artist. But, above all, I feel happy and contented. Having passed

now nearly twenty years in ups and downs, I am used to them, and perhaps a little practice in them may turn out to benefit. It is now exactly twenty years since I was on the ocean of business, and, though I laugh at fortune, I am persuaded that she alone is the governor of worldly riches, and when it is fit she will call on me."

This is his first reference to a man by whom he was for many years to live. In plain and simple terms, Thomas Butts now entered Blake's life to give him the right, during eleven critical years, to live and be himself, in however miraculous a manner. "For years," wrote Samuel Palmer (friend and disciple of Blake in his latter years) in 1881, Butts "stood between the greatest designer in England and the workhouse—that designer being, of all men whom I ever knew, the most practically sane, steady, frugal and industrious. Dear Mr. Blake had promised to take me himself to see Mr. Butts's collection—but, alas!—it never came off." Palmer knew of what he spoke. His closing words are independent testimony that Blake thought of Butts, not merely as a buyer of his pictures, but as one who found him a repository where his work could be securely housed until his light was acknowledged among men.

Apparently it was through Flaxman that Blake met Thomas Butts; for when Flaxman returned from Italy in 1794 he set up house in Buckingham Street, Fitzroy Square, and it was in Fitzroy Square that Butts lived. It is not known when they met. Nor is it known if Butts bought any pictures from Blake before this time. But for another eleven years Butts' house in Fitzroy Square became the repository of Blake's pictures at one guinea apiece. During that time, the relations between the two men were never ruffled. Butts laughed gently sometimes at Blake's visions, for he was not one whom such things visited; he had a grim humour of his own, to enliven the plain ways of his life; but whatever Blake brought or sent him he paid for modestly at a guinea a time, and continued to do so until his house could hold no more. The consequence is that what the world to-day knows of Blake it knows in large measure by the sale of his purchases, that have found their way into most of the representative collections of Blake's work in Europe and America.

Thomas Butts now, at this critical period, stepped in to help Blake with an order for fifty pictures. Into that order went several of the Colour-printed Drawings that Blake had been unable to sell. His service was even greater than so practical and immediate a help at a time of necessity. The fact that Blake, despite the pictures that lay unsold in his house, was hard at work to complete an order for fifty pictures, is evidence, if

none other were available, that he had not continued to paint pictures when he found himself unable to sell them. Now he turned to his brush again in good earnest, for he had found a trustworthy, if modest, market that was, at this time, his only surety against destitution.

CHAPTER THREE

FELPHAM
(1800-1803)

I

The greatest change in Blake's life was now to come to him, enabling him, spiritually, mentally and physically, to renew his life at its sources. Some such renewal seems to have been required. Though Blake, in his letter to George Cumberland, declared himself " happy and contented," he was evidently near an end of his resources. He could no longer find employment from the booksellers. Even Fuseli seems to have turned from him. He was living, as he himself wrote, " by miracle." At this moment Flaxman came again to his assistance.

Among Flaxman's pupils was the son of a squire of Sussex, named William Hayley, who had won contemporary fame some twenty years before this by a poem entitled *The Triumphs of Temper*. His title to memory to-day is that he befriended Blake. Through Flaxman the two men met. In the summer of 1800 Hayley prepared to write the life of Cowper, who had died in the April of that year ; and it was suggested that Blake might be employed to engrave the illustrations to the book. Hayley agreed ; he presented Blake with a presentation copy of his poem, inscribed with pleasant lines to his " gentle visionary Blake " ; and he invited Blake to come and live near him at Felpham, in Sussex, while the work progressed.

So it was that Blake in September, 1800, left London, where he had lived the forty-three years of his life. For the first time he saw the ocean come in from the horizon like a wall of water, and wash the shores at his feet. He saw the Sussex Downs rise up behind him like another wall, and he wrote in his notebook,

> Great things are done when men and mountains meet ;
> That is not done by jostling in the street.

He saw the stars, not the stars seen in London, high above the streeted chasms, but descending to earth on every side ; and in time he proceeded to paint a picture of *Jacob's Ladder* to celebrate his discovery ; but at once he instructed his wife to send verses to Mrs. Flaxman, bidding her

> Away to sweet Felpham, for Heaven is there ;
> The ladder of angels descends through the air ;
> On the Turret its spiral does softly descend,
> Through the village then winds, at my cot it does end.

You stand in the village and look up to Heaven ;
The precious stones glitter on flights seventy-seven ;
And my brother is there, and my Friend and Thine,
Descend and ascend with the Bread and the Wine.

He had been to Felpham to search the country, and choose a residence, before coming to his decision. He had selected a cottage, at a rental of £20 a year, not far from the new turreted house Hayley had built for himself. On their arrival at this cottage in September he himself at once wrote to Flaxman, his " Dear Sculptor of Eternity." The letter declares the joy of his liberation from the wolves of doubt and fear and want that had been drawing closer around him at Hercules Buildings, when their voices could be heard in the night while he looked at his comrade and his comrade looked at him.

" We are safe arrived at our cottage," he wrote, " which is more beautiful than I thought it, and more convenient. It is a perfect model for cottages, and I think for palaces of magnificence, only enlarging, not altering its proportions, and adding ornaments and not principles. Nothing can be more grand than its simplicity and usefulness. I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates ; her windows are not obstructed by vapours ; voices of celestial inhabitants are most distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen ; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses." Yet that was not all. Fear had been slain ; but doubt also was slain. " Now begins a new life, because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life ; and those works are the delight and study of archangels. Why, then, should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our Father will do for us and with us according to His divine will for our good."

2

Thus, within a day of his arrival, the cross-purposes of his life at Felpham are apparent. To see those cross-purposes stand like trees against the dawn, it is curious to compare this letter to Flaxman, dated 21st September, on arrival at Felpham, with Flaxman's letter to Hayley, dated 18th August, thanking Hayley for his " usual benevolence in favour of my friend Blake." " I hope," he wrote, " that Blake's residence at Felpham

will be a mutual comfort to you and to him, and I see no reason why he should not make as good a livelihood there as in London, if he engraves and teaches drawing, by which he may gain considerably, as also by making neat drawings of different kinds ; but if he places any dependence on painting large pictures, for which he is not qualified by habit or study, he will be miserably deceived."[1]

Too clearly, the pictures Blake had painted in ages of eternity, the delight and study of archangels, were not the neat drawings of different kinds that Flaxman and Hayley plotted for him so hopefully. These cross-purposes were not at once apparent to Blake himself. Probably he was the only person to whom they were not apparent. Mrs. Blake's days were probably spent defending him from that knowledge until (as he was afterwards to describe in parable) she ran to appease the inevitable warfare. He bent himself sincerely, with simple thankfulness at his good fortune, to do what was required of him, and to give satisfaction to those who employed him ; for he lived now, not by the bounty of Hayley, but by payment for work done, just as he had done in London. There was now this difference, that Hayley lived near him, with many commissions for him to render ; and he was slow to understand that the commissions of benevolence could bind chains upon his spirit.

Hayley wrote broad-sheet ballads. Blake made engravings for them on pewter ; and the ballads are now only remembered for their engravings. Hayley desired drawings of poets to adorn his library. Blake drew them for him. In February, 1801, Hayley wrote proudly to George Romney that he had taught Blake " to paint in miniature, and in truth he has made a very creditable copy of the dear departed bard," Cowper. Blake, therefore, had successfully been brought into the way of making the " neat drawings " that Flaxman had desired ; and during that year he worked hard at making miniature portraits for orders that Hayley, Flaxman and Butts got for him. " My present engagements," he writes in May of that year, " are in miniature-painting. Miniature has become a goddess in my eyes, and my friends in Sussex say that I excel in the pursuit. I have a great many orders, and they multiply." It appears that he was introduced by Hayley and Flaxman to the neighbouring gentry, from whom these orders came. The orders included, it is said, one to paint a set of handscreens for a lady of quality ; but at that point Blake's docility broke. He would have

[1] Flaxman's reference in this letter to the teaching of drawing rather confirms the suggestion that has been made that it was he who, though in Italy, devised that method of livelihood for Blake at Lambeth.

nothing to do with handscreens, for Lady Bathurst or any other. He did, however, return to the task of teaching drawing; and was engaged for that purpose by families in the neighbourhood.

There is a pitiful humour in seeing these kindly attempts to mew an eagle, in order that it might be sure of eating bread. More pitiful still is it to see the eagle endeavouring to show thankful enthusiasm at the treatment. The terror (for it could have been no less) of the last years at Lambeth was too recent for him to think of flight again so soon. He was content to do all these tasks that were laid upon him, if he was only left time enough to attend to the other commissions he received invisibly. But he could not find that time. Therefore, though earnest to please, he was soon restless to be gone. By September, 1801, within a year of his coming to Felpham, he writes to Butts: "I labour incessantly. I accomplish not one half of what I intend, because my abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over mountains and valleys, which are not real, into a land of abstraction where spectres of the dead wander. This I endeavour to prevent; I, with my whole might, chain my feet to the world of duty and reality. But in vain! the faster I bind, the better is the ballast, for I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights, and often it seems lighter than a ball of wool rolled by the wind."

These words are obviously translated into the language of Butts; for Butts' "world of duty and reality" and "abstract folly" would not perfectly bear those titles in Blake's philosophy. Yet the letter holds a clue to reveal how barren the year had been for Blake. He was still working for Butts; and he writes to apologise that pictures commissioned, and apparently paid for, a year before, when Blake first went to Felpham, were still unfinished. These pictures were part of Blake's creative work, and he would hardly have willingly neglected them. A whole year, therefore, had been spent in running errands to serve Hayley's and Flaxman's kindly care of him.

3

In spite of his caution, Hayley taught the eagle to snuff his native air. He began now to teach him Greek and Latin; later he taught him Hebrew as well. In January, 1803, Blake wrote to his brother James saying, "I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar, and the Testament is my chief master: astonishing indeed is the English Translation, it is almost word for word." The study opened an entire new world for Blake. He might attest the faithfulness of the Authorised Version of the New Testament;

but he began now to read it free from the language that familiarity had emptied of meaning. He read it with the same care, with the same freshness, with the same expectation of something new to be learned, that he had read Paracelsus' *Philosophy Addressed to the Athenians*, or any other secret and visionary scripture. He read it with new eyes for new depths and meanings unsuspected by the scribes. The effect on him was tremendous; and that effect appears on nearly everything he made after this time, either in difficult mystical books or in simpler, more lucid pictures.

The first effect of the change was not helpful. He had brought with him from London the MS. of his new poem *Vala*, in which the symbolic drama of man's spiritual life was to be displayed as a whole, as parts of it had been fragmentarily revealed in the earlier Prophetic Books. Now as he read John's *Revelation* new matter was unfolded before him. He perceived that the four mysterious "beasts," "full of eyes before and behind," who were gathered round about him who sat upon the throne, were not "beasts" at all; but that the Greek word meant "Beings," or "Living-Ones." He went back to the Four Living Creatures of Ezekiel's vision (the water-colour drawings he made for Butts, the only buyer of his work, reveal the track of his thoughts) and then to the Threefold Life of Man he had accepted from Jacob Boehme. Moreover, he had been reading Wilkin's translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, published in London in 1787 (and here again he has left a record in his water-colour drawing of *The Brahmins; Mr. Wilkin translating the Geeta*) and he remembered the four Regents of the four quarters of the zodiac. Who were these but the Four Living-Ones, the Four Zoas, of the Revelation, encompassing the four quarters of the world?

So he came to his own Prophetic Books, of which *Vala* was to be the consummation. It was clear to him that the chief personages of his mythological system (such as Urthona, the spirit, Luvah, the emotion, and Urizen, the reason) were three of the Four Beings of the Revelation. Yet he was not satisfied, for the fourth was lacking. What happened can be fairly clearly discovered. He added a new personage in *Vala*, wanting to make the four Regents, and entitled it Tharmas, from the Hindu Tamas, meaning "desire," to represent the body, so to complete a new Fourfold Man. He then proceeded to rewrite large parts of the poem, that it might carry his new teaching; for the rewritten poem is strewn with metaphors and pictures taken from the scenes of country-life to which he refers in his letters from Felpham. Finally he struck out the title *Vala*,

and substituted a new title *The Four Zoas*, the Greek word being taken from John's *Revelation* almost as he found it.

Scarcely surprising, under the circumstances, that *The Four Zoas* remains without form and finish. In one of the Nights the same story is told twice, in different ways, one following on the other, without any attempt to weave the two in one. In several places there is repetition, indecision, confusion, as though old and new warred against one another. Despite all this, for those who desire to learn what Blake had to deliver, this drama of spiritual psychology contains a fuller treatment of his mythological system than he has unfolded elsewhere. But he did not finish it. He conceived a new Prophetic Book for which *The Four Zoas* was to be but the preparatory study; and, in fact, in the new long poem which he prepared to write he lifted long passages from this MS., indicating that he did not intend it for publication.[1]

Thus it happened that Hayley, even while he hoped to mew the eagle, tempted him to spread his wing for new flights in the prophetic heavens. Benevolently all-knowing, he prepared Blake for a revolt against the tyranny of his benevolence that was to astonish him greatly when it came.

[1] The state of the MS. has, perhaps, some interest in this connection. It consists of seventy sheets. Of these forty-seven are engraved illustrations to *Night Thoughts;* twenty-one are ordinary drawing paper; and two are written only on one side, the other side being an old engraving torn in two as if Blake was short of paper. The thought that suggests itself is that in 1797 Blake wrote the copy he made then wholly on engraved sheets for *Night Thoughts*, and that the rest of the poem consists of sections re-written at Felpham. An examination of the MS. seems to sustain this view, though it raises other difficulties. Tharmas, for example, appears on what, in this view, would be one of the new sheets. On the other hand, the drawing paper bears the watermark of 1794—but, then, Blake would not be the first, or the last, to use paper six years old from the mill. The retention of the old title *Vala* till quite late is seen by the fact that it still remains on the second sheet, at the head of, or beginning of, the poem, with the text in Greek written beside it.

The interest in this, however, is not merely bibliographical. If this view be correct, it means that all the astonishing drawings that Blake made in the margins of the drawing paper were done at Felpham, and belong to the broodings that suggested the writing of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Certainly the text in Greek, from *Ephesians* vi. 12, did not appear before the Felpham days. And the poem written in 1801 containing the lines:

> Now I a fourfold vision see,
> And a fourfold vision is given to me,

indicates that the conception of the fourfold life of Man came to him at Felpham, and not before.

4

In spite of his many tasks, Blake had been busy in other ways also. In the peace of Felpham, while his life renewed itself, even beyond his knowledge, new fountains of thought (that were, in fact, old original fountains) were broken ; and he reviewed all his thoughts on art, as to its purpose and its execution.

It is apparent to every one who considers his pictures that from the time when, about 1790, he began to use tempera he endeavoured to paint in the manner he had once so vigorously denounced. His denunciation had always been too vigorous to suggest that he had himself been wholly convinced. Perhaps (the doubt remained) they were right who built their pictures in mass and depth, in light and shade, throwing down the outline by which the picture had first been framed so as to attain perspective, distance and all those qualities which the eye bestows on the visual world. He had found a medium suitable to his inclination, giving him none of the exasperation with which his attempts to manage oil had left him. Why not, then, attempt this other manner of painting, if only to enable him to prove the question anew for himself?

So, as the years advanced, he was found seeking more and more to attain the results he had denounced in the Venetian and Flemish painters, and moving further from his early gods among the Florentines. In his great series of Colour-printed Drawings his effort to get mass and depth, light and shade, by his new invention is obvious. In these drawings he preserved his original outline sharply and clearly for his figures, and bestowed the other qualities on all other parts of the picture, by printing heavy masses of colour from the millboard, with such successfully combined effects as may be seen in *Nebuchadnezzar*. In still later pictures he went further. In the absence of dates for all pictures his progress is not easy to determine ; but in the *Infant Jesus Riding on a Lamb*, dated 1800,[1] and its companion, the *Infant Jesus Lying Asleep on a Cross*, the progress is marked. To this period would seem to belong other paintings in tempera of the same kind, notably the undated *Angel Appearing to Zacharias*. Here, in the figure of Zacharias, and in the heavy darkness surrounding the immediate scene, the influence of Rembrandt shows strongly—Rembrandt, whom he was so vigorously to denounce.

It is significant that his paintings in this manner belong to a period of his life when darkness and perhaps despair had fallen on him. It may, or

[1] See Plate 41.

may not, be merely chance, but it is a fact that he leant on the effects that the light of this world bestows on the fashion of things at a time when the light of his own mind had begun to fail him, because of sore need and ruin of his hopes. Now at Felpham his life was being renewed; the light of his mind was beginning again to shine strongly. Finding no need for the support of the visual world, he took his own recent practice sharply to task, gathered together his scattered thoughts, and came to new conclusions, that were but his old conclusions more clearly defined, and therefore fit to be more emphatically expressed.

Here again Hayley proved his own undoing. Had he not taught Blake to make miniatures, and procured him patrons for the new art? Here was plentiful occasion to examine the difference between that which the eye sees and that which the imagination conveys. It was because of his failure to make an adequate miniature of Butts that in September, 1801, he wrote to Butts (in a passage that has already been quoted): "I have now discovered that without nature before the painter's eye, he can never produce anything in the walks of natural painting. Historical designing is one thing, and portrait-painting another: and they are as distinct as any two arts can be. Happy would that man be who could unite them!"

A few months later, in January, 1802, writing again to Butts (the sharer of all his griefs and discoveries at this time), he says: "One thing of real consequence I have accomplished by coming into the country, which is to me consolation enough: namely, I have recollected all my scattered thoughts on art, and resumed my primitive and original ways of execution, in both painting and engraving, which in the confusion of London I had very much lost and obliterated from my mind. But whatever becomes of my labour, I would rather that they should be preserved in your greenhouse (not, as you mistakenly call it, dunghill) than in the cold gallery of fashion. The sun may yet shine, and then they will be brought into open air."

In November of this year he writes again to Butts: "I have now given two years to the intense study of those parts of the art which relate to light and shade and colour, and am convinced that either my understanding is incapable of comprehending the beauties of colouring, or the pictures which I painted for you are equal in every part of the art, and superior in one, to anything that has been done since the age of Raphael." He quotes Sir Joshua Reynolds with enthusiasm at least this once: 'You are certainly right in saying that variety of tints and forms is picturesque; but it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the reverse of this

(*uniformity of colour* and a *long continuation of lines*) produces grandeur.' " So says Sir Joshua, and so say I," exultantly he adds. Even more significantly, indicating the changes he had in mind, he says in the same letter : " If you have not nature before you for every touch, you cannot paint portrait ; and if you have nature before you at all, you cannot paint history. It was Michael Angelo's opinion and is mine."

Butts, unfortunately, did not reply to him that what Michael Angelo took from a close study of the nude form, examined and drawn during a long discipline from every angle, in action and at rest, and stored in his brain for hand and eye to use at need, it might not be so good for Blake to take from Michael Angelo, especially when he had no opportunity of seeing Michael Angelo's work for himself. The knotted muscles and contorted limbs, which he used so freely, he took from Michael Angelo, whereas Michael Angelo took them from models that he had studied so completely as to need them no longer. Therefore what had at first, in Michael Angelo's practice, been a discovery, was always in danger, in Blake's handling, of becoming a device, a system of symbols and patterns to express his ideas.

Apart from all this (which he never had the opportunity to remedy), Blake made a re-discovery essentially true to himself. The light he needed for his pictures was not the light of the sun. The light of the sun could only confuse and baffle him, and make him paint a kind of picture that others could have painted. The extension he needed was not in space, but in spirit. The light he sought was the light that never was on sea or land. When he was most truly himself, he won these things. Then, even where his pictures bewilder most when first they are seen, because of some strange anatomy or careless drawing, they will afterwards haunt the imagination, will take on a new life, growing larger and changing the look of the world, when other, more perfect, pictures have been forgotten.[1]

These things he could only bring from within himself, or from beyond himself (and perhaps the two are really one), to shape into his pictures. All his cogitations and furies were his attempts to express this experience ; and the peace of Felpham was needed to help him to re-learn it. Now, after a year there, he was finding new power flowing into his life, and he desired that it should flow on into poems and pictures relying on nothing else for their inspiration. He was planning a new great poem, in which he was to chant (not too distinctly) his dependence from pure inspiration. In

[1] Let me record my experience that I have been surprised, in recording the sizes of some of the pictures in this collection, to find how small they really are.

painting he resolved to return to his "primitive and original ways of execution," in the hope that "the sun may yet shine." In his Prophetic Books, Orc, the spirit of revolt, was born of Enitharmon, the spirit of inspiration. In his life the fullness of inspiration was always the prelude to the outbreak of revolt. Revolt was, therefore, not far away.

5

The first clear sign he gave of revolt was a letter to Butts dated January, 1802. Whether we seek or decline to understand it, this letter is a key to the meaning of his days and of his work. "My unhappiness," he tells the one man whom we might suppose to have had least sympathy with the occasion of his grief, "has arisen from a source which, if explored too narrowly, might hurt my pecuniary circumstances. . . . I find on all hands great objections to my doing anything but the mere drudgery of business, and intimations that if I do confine myself to this, I shall not live. This has always pursued me. You will understand by this the cause of all my uneasiness. This from Johnson and Fuseli brought me down here, and this from Mr. H. will bring me back again. For that I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is certain and determined, and to this I have long made up my mind. And why this should be made an objection to me, while drunkenness, lewdness, gluttony, and even idleness itself, do not hurt other men, let Satan himself explain. The thing I have most at heart—more than life, or all that seems to make life comfortable without—is the interest of true religion and science. . . . Temptations are on the right hand and on the left. Behind, the sea of time and space roars and follows swiftly. He who keeps not right onwards is lost; and if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear and tremble?"

Then he adds words that were to him of dreadful meaning: "If we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the tasks set before us; if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires, who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! I, too, well remember the threats I heard! 'If you, who are organised by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, refuse, and bury your natural talent in the earth, even though you should want natural bread, sorrow and desperation pursue you through life, and after death shame and confusion of face to eternity. Every one in eternity will leave you, aghast at the man who was crowned with glory and honour by his brethren, and betrayed their

cause to their enemies. You will be called the base Judas who betrayed his friend!' Such words would make any stout man tremble, and how then could I be at ease? But I am no longer in that state, and now go on again with my tasks, fearless, though my path is difficult. I have no fear of stumbling while I keep it."

Strange words! Not less strange because he lived their meaning; or because, having so lived, Time has sealed his works, and chooses only to remember his counsellors because they opposed or helped him. He claimed that he was serving the Master of Eternity, rejecting the illusions of mortality; and his works with time grow brighter, while the works of his counsellors have utterly faded away. Not lightly did he hold his faith. He has himself described how Revolt was not born of Inspiration without severe pangs. In a poem written in the summer of 1801 (for so Blake himself dated it when he sent it to Butts in November, 1802) he described how the Tempter met him as he walked from Felpham to Levant, while "happiness stretch'd across the hills,"

> With Silver Angels across my way,
> And Golden demons that none can stay;
> With my Father hovering upon the wind,
> And my Brother Robert just behind,
> And my Brother John, the evil one,
> In a black cloud making his mone.

Then the Tempter confronted him, in form, says he, of a "frowning Thistle":

> For double the vision my eyes do see,
> And a double vision is always with me.
> With my inward eye, 'tis an old man grey;
> With my outward, a thistle across my way.[1]

The temptation was as singularly sly as all such temptations are. It carries its authenticity in that fact; for the doubt it suggested was the very opposite of the conviction that was gathering in Blake's mind. Only at Felpham, suggested the "old man grey," were Desire, Inspiration and the Spirit of Poetry (Theotormon, Enitharmon and Los) to be found. If he went to London,

> Because thou backward dost return,
> Poverty, envy, old age, and fear,
> Shall bring thy wife upon a bier.
> And Butts shall give what Fuseli gave,
> A dark black Rock, and a gloomy Cave.

[1] One is irresistibly reminded of "the aged man in Rural weeds" of *The First Temptation* that Blake was afterwards to draw in his *Paradise Regained* Series. That, too, was "an old

Blake's reply was to strike " the thistle with my foot," and to call upon Los.

So I spoke, and struck in my wrath
The old man weltering upon my path.
Then Los appear'd in all his power :
In the sun he appear'd, descending before
My face in fierce flames ; in my double sight,
'Twas outward a Sun, inward Los in his might.

To Los, in this false guise, accordingly, Blake addresses himself :

" My hands are labour'd day and night,
And Ease comes never in my sight.
My Wife has no indulgence given,
Except what comes to her from heaven.
We eat little, we drink less ;
This Earth breeds not our happiness.
Another Sun feeds our life's streams,—
We are not warmed with thy beams ;
Thou measurest not the time to me,
Nor yet the space that I do see ;
My Mind is not with thy light array'd,
Thy terrors shall not make me afraid."
When I had my Defiance given,
The Sun stood trembling in heaven ;
The Moon, that glow'd remote below,
Became leprous and white as snow ;
And every soul of man on the Earth
Felt affliction, and sorrow, and sickness, and death.
Los Flam'd in my path, and the sun was hot
With the bows of my Mind and the Arrows of Thought—
My bowstring fierce with Ardour breathes,
My arrows glow in their golden sheaves ;
My brother and sister march before ;
The heavens drop with human gore.
Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me ;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
And threefold in soft Beulah's night,
And twofold always. May God us keep
From Single Vision, and Newton's sleep !

It was characteristic of Blake that he should not have sent this poem to Butts until his fight had been won. He had seen his life in the light of Eternity, a light that threw value on certain of its acts, causing others to

man grey," with a like temptation ; and it is hardly likely that the parallel was not somewhere present in Blake's mind. See Plate 25.

seem of little consequence. He had seen these values utterly reversed in the wisdom of mortality, as discovered by the judgments of Hayley, one of the most successful poets of his hour. He knew quite clearly all that was involved; and he withheld the poem of his warfare, that made simple the issue before him, until his decision had been attained.

In the letter in which he enclosed this poem he wrote: "though I have been unhappy, I am so no longer. I am again emerged into the light of day; I still and shall to eternity embrace Christianity, and adore Him who is the express image of God; but I have travelled through perils and darkness not unlike a champion. I have conquered, and shall go on conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my course among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser. My enthusiasm is still what it was, only enlarged and confirmed."

These are words of decision and triumph. By November, 1802, therefore, his return was determined in his mind, however long it might be delayed in the event. What was the occasion of this triumph? Note the particular words by which it is conveyed. "Nothing can withstand the fury of my course among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser." This is a faithful description of what appears to have been a prelude to a new long poem on which he had been engaged. "Now I a fourfold vision see, and a fourfold vision is given to me," he announced. That vision he had attempted to convey in the reconstruction of *Vala* as *The Four Zoas;* but the poem had broken down in the labour of reconstruction. So he had begun a new poem to tell the story of the Fourfold Man, the "Giant Albion," "our ancestor, in whose sleep or Chaos creation began," and of his Emanation Jerusalem. Of this new poem the burthen was the "fourfold vision"; but it was prefaced, apparently, by a spiritual autobiography telling how the poem had come to him "among the stars of God," and how, for the writing of it, he had first to triumph "in the abysses of the accuser." He had now written this poem, it seems. He was therefore able to announce his triumph; and he withheld his earlier lines until his decision had been attained in the throes of creation.

6

Five months later, in April, 1803, he wrote to tell Butts that he had decided to return to London, "with the full approbation of Mr. Hayley." "None can know the spiritual acts of my three years' slumber on the banks of ocean," he wrote in that letter, "unless he has seen them in the spirit,

or unless he should read my long poem descriptive of those acts; for I have in these years composed an immense number of verses on one grand theme, similar to Homer's *Iliad* or Milton's *Paradise Lost;* the persons and machinery entirely new to the inhabitants of earth (some of the persons excepted). I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense poem exists which seems to be the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study. I mention this to show you what I think the grand reason of my being brought down here."

In July of the same year, in another letter to Butts, he wrote: "I hope that all our three years' trouble ends in good luck at last, and shall be forgot by my affections, and only remembered by my understanding; to be a memento in time to come, and to speak to future generations by a sublime allegory, which is now perfectly completed into a grand poem. I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the authors are in eternity. I consider it as the grandest poem that this world contains. Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry. It is also somewhat in the same manner defined by Plato. This poem shall, by Divine assistance, be progressively printed and ornamented with prints, and given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr. Hayley, since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shown it to him, and he has read part by his own desire, and has looked with sufficient contempt to enhance my opinion of it. But I do not wish to imitate by seeming obstinate in poetic pursuits. But if all the world should set their faces against this, I have orders to set my face like a flint (Ezekiel iii. 9) against their faces, and my forehead against their foreheads."

What was this "grandest poem"? Not *The Four Zoas*. Hardly would he so proudly have announced a poem that lay unfinished, from which he had begun to lift long passages for use elsewhere. An examination of his two later Prophetic Books, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, indicates that it was neither of these poems as they were afterwards printed by Blake. Both these poems together appear originally to have formed the "grandest poem." The title-page of *Milton* gives the first clue. Both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are dated 1804, that being the date when Blake, on his return from Felpham, at last found himself free to write and ornament his "grandest poem" on copper for Illuminated Printing; but *Milton* is

described as " A Poem in 12 Books,"[1] whereas the poem as printed only contains two books. The beautiful introductory stanzas to *Milton*, in the *Preface* on Plate 2, gives the next clue. They clearly announce the theme of the poem to be the " building of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land." But no such theme follows. It is begun ; but it is not completed. It is not even continued after a trial-beginning. A change of plan, therefore, evidently occurred after Blake made his early plates of *Milton*.

Internal evidence supplies the rest. *Milton* begins early with the creation by Los, the Poet-Prophet, of Golgonooza (the unhappy name of the city of Art) and the laying of the foundations of Jerusalem, the city of Spiritual Liberty. It passes then to the conflict between Palamabron (who is none other than Blake) and Satan, of " incomparable mildness " (in whom Hayley would certainly not have instantly recognised himself when he read the poem at his own desire), as to who should drive the harrow of Palamabron's toil. A good part of the poem is taken with this conflict. Then Milton enters. The manner and occasion of his entry are described. The poem tells how Milton entered into Blake, and became one with him in order (as he subsequently explained) that Blake might correct certain errors that Milton had propagated in his works. In its last pages, the poem returns towards Jerusalem, the building of which has not yet advanced further than its foundations. Before that return is completed, Milton enjoins obedience to the " words of the Inspired Man " that " the Children of

[1] On March 9th, 1907, a reviewer in *The Academy* suggested that the words "A Poem in 12 Books " should read "A Poem in 2 Books." " The 2," he said, " is in the middle of a round dark space, enclosed by wreaths of white cloud," whereas what had till then been read as " 1 " was, in fact, " a stroke among the enclosing lines of decoration." Since then the suggestion has been generally accepted. So, indeed, I assumed it to be, until I examined the page for myself. I found the " 1 " to be a clear firm stroke running right across the direction of " the enclosing lines of decoration," a bolder stronger line of the same character as the " 2 " that follows. The circle made by the fainter lines of decoration encloses, not the " 2 " only, but the " 1 " as well. Not content to trust only my own examination, I sought the judgment of others, taking care to choose those who were not familiar with Blake, whose opinion, therefore, would not be influenced by the consideration that the poem did in fact contain only two books. Their judgment in each case confirmed my own. Not finding myself able, therefore, to accept any longer this easy road out of the difficulty, it was necessary to find some other explanation of the problem. And it seems clear to me from Blake's introductions to both poems, taken together with the text of each, that " the immense number of verses on one grand theme " were an original poem in twelve books, and that that original poem contained *Milton*, substantially as it now appears, and *Jerusalem* before it was recast in another form, for reasons that appear later.

Jerusalem may be saved from slavery." He announces that he comes now

> To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration,
> That is no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness
> Cast on the Inspired by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
> Indefinite or paltry Rhymes, or paltry Harmonies.

Throughout, *Milton* reads less like a complete poem, with its own theme, than as an introduction to a poem. Everything seems prepared for the continuation of the work on *Jerusalem*. Blake's own difficulties are an introduction. Milton's coming and counsel are a continuation of that introduction. But there the poem ends, when all created things are ready "to go forth to the Great Harvest and Vintage of the Nations." Not until the poem *Jerusalem* is the building of the City of Golgonooza (the pattern and reflection in time of Jerusalem, the city of Spiritual Beauty and Liberty in Eternity) fairly continued. In *Jerusalem* appears the full treatment of the theme that had been opened in *Milton*. The two seem, therefore, originally to have been one. Events later than the writing of the "grandest poem" occurred, revealing new evil adversaries of the Inspired Man, causing Blake to recast *Jerusalem* so as to include them in a new pattern. He seems, therefore, to have broken his poem into two: *Jerusalem* containing the actual theme of the poem, *Milton* the spiritual biography that was to serve as an introduction to that theme.

7

The exposition of *Jerusalem* has its own separate place. In it, and in *The Four Zoas*, Blake expressed his vision of the life of Man. If man rises above the beasts because he can review his actions in the light of a spiritual future, then Blake's vision calls for attentive study. Few will be found to undertake that study, perhaps, because of the formidable difficulties with which he has hedged his vision. That vision can quite simply be told; and that is to say that Blake could quite simply have told it. Not that it would then be easy. Nothing that calls for imagination and intellect (without which there is no worth) is easy; but it would at least not need to be deciphered; and it is in their deciphering that these poems present the chief of their difficulties.

One strand of that vision may be picked, for it belongs to the plan of Blake's days, and reveals how he regarded the work of the artist. To Blake all that is called beauty is the perception in this opaque world of Time and Space of the qualities of the eternal world, where neither Time

nor Space exist. In that other world Man's life is lived. He has fallen into the world of Time and Space by the separation of the faculties of reason and imagination. By the faculty of reason, in its fallen estate separated from imagination, man can only perceive Life, which is eternal, in its dead forms, which are temporal ; can only perceive his eternal powers by division into contraries, called good and evil, heaven and hell, both of which are essential to the Divine vision of a complete, whole life ; can therefore only erect prohibitions and laws for a continual frustration of spiritual liberty. Meanwhile strewn around him are signs of beauty, evidences of the estate of which his life is part. These signs, noted by his senses, lead to voluptuousness and base Art. Their true significance can only be perceived by the imagination, for the imagination is a true faculty, a spiritual sense, part of the Divine Life, answering in man to the evidences of beauty without, enabling him to rise to his full intellectual stature, above Time, above Space, in the world of spirit.

The true man of imagination is the artist, for of that beauty are his works made. Therefore the artist in all ages has been accounted the greatest of men by the true, because eternal, instinct of his fellows. Only the works of the artist have in all ages survived the ravages of time, beautiful always as when first they were made, when the works of the man of reason, whether scientist or law-giver, have been forgotten or superseded. Greatest of all artists was Jesus Christ. He never appealed to the reason, made no laws, set up no prohibitions, but preached forgiveness and remission of errors, appealing to the imagination for the attainment of full, spontaneous, spiritual liberty, triumphant over matter, full of truth and beauty, rejoicing in Eternal Life, the estate from which man has fallen into material death. Such was the new birth Jesus Christ announced as His gospel, adjuring men to put off the works of reason, since these are but forms of death, and to become re-born in the spirit into Eternal Life, where Mind (being the Imagination and the Reason resolved in one) can attain full intellectual power. This is true Revolution, born of Inspiration. This is Eternal Life, in the light of which every act on earth is to be determined. This is the true Science, the works of which can never be overthrown. This is the greatness of Art, for Art alone, of all the activities of men, by the exercise of the spiritual faculty of Imagination, perceives the significance of beauty, the light of eternity struggling through the opaqueness of Nature seen by the natural eye, and from that beauty builds something that is eternal, because it is the pattern and reflection in Time of the beauty and liberty of Eternity.

Only the works of the Artist, therefore, have virtue, the quality of continuance. All the rest is part of the illusion of dead matter, however organised, in ecclesiastical, social or scientific systems. The Man of Imagination is free from them all; and the supreme Man of Imagination is the Artist, thereby also a Prophet. Does he not unveil a life for ever true, beyond Time and Space, a life that must therefore ultimately triumph? Accordingly, the Artist, by appealing to the imagination in the creation of Intellectual Beauty, is doing, in his own manner, the divine work of Jesus Christ. But he has great enemies. First there are those who shoot out the lip, for

> The idiot Reasoner laughs at the Man of Imagination,
> And from laughter proceeds to murder by undervaluing calumny.

Deeper still is the plausible councillor of worldly wisdom. He is the subtle one. It was he who, in just this very manner, tempted the Master of all Artists in the wilderness, with offers of food and power and security. He, wherever and however he appears, is Satan the Adversary, the Prophet of the Great Illusion, against whom the Artist must fiercely defend himself, if his work is not to be undone.

8

Little wonder, then, that in his spiritual autobiography, intended as an introduction to his "grandest poem," Blake should have called mild William Hayley Satan. In three places he has left records of his conflict with Satan. In his letters to Butts he told the plain earthly manner of it. In *Milton* he recorded the high heavenly manner of it. In his notebook he left the track of his dreadful war.

Ever original in all things Blake invented a method of warfare greatly to be commended. At Satan he flung mighty and terrible barbs; but he flung them no further than his notebook. Satan, therefore, received them; Blake was eased and heartened; and Hayley was not affronted. All the value of the conflict was preserved; but no harm was done, no injury followed, and Blake remained Hayley's friend when it was all over. It was admirably done, and is a pattern of wisdom for all wars. Thus he relieves himself—

On H—y's Friendship.

> When H—y finds out what you cannot do,
> That is the very thing he'll set you to;
> If you break not your neck, 'tis not his fault;
> But pecks of poison are not pecks of salt.

Or again,

On H. the Pickthank.

I write the rascal thanks, till he and I
With thanks and compliments are quite drawn dry.

Or again, with heartfelt simplicity :—

Thy friendship oft has made my heart to ache :
Do be my enemy—for friendship's sake.

In *Milton* this was turned to the line that " Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies " ; or as he wrote to Butts, " if a man is the enemy of my spiritual life while he pretends to be the friend of my corporeal, he is a real enemy ; but the man may be the friend of my spiritual life while he seems the enemy of my corporeal, though not *vice versa*."

The fullest account, and also the most ravelled, was written into *Milton*. It is not easy to decipher what occurred, on earth or in the heavens. Some of the symbols, when too closely compared, yield strange results, that may or may not have been meant. But it is clear that when the contest between Blake and Hayley reached its height, when mutual regard between the two men (symbolised as Tulloh) was slain, and spiritual conflict (symbolised as Michael) took its place, it was Mrs. Blake who ran between the two men, and made peace. There seems no reason to doubt that it was she who made it possible for him to continue at Felpham as long as he did. In January, 1802, he first wrote to Butts about the matter. Not till September of the following year did he leave Felpham. True, Butts at first was annoyed (or so, at least, James Blake wrote to say), while Flaxman told him he was mad ; but these things would not have deterred Blake. His lines in *Milton* are clearly meant to convey that it was she who held him at Felpham as long as he remained.[1]

9

By July, 1803, he was " determined to be no longer pestered with Hayley's genteel ignorance and polite disapprobation." He began to prepare for departure. But a startling event was to occur before he went, that was to change the entire attitude of his mind towards Hayley's benevolence, and the sincerity of his friendship.

One day, in August of that year, Blake saw a trooper of the Royal Dragoons standing in his garden. He did not know that the Dragoon had been

[1] It is perhaps significant that Tatham says nothing whatsoever of the years at Felpham.

invited there by a gardener, and probably did not stop to enquire very closely into the matter. His views on war and revolt do not lead anyone to suppose that he did. He declares that he " desired him as politely as possible to go out of the garden " ; but the Dragoon, pardonably perhaps, did not hear the politeness quite as it may have been meant. At any rate, the Dragoon threatened to knock his eyes out, " with many abominable imprecations and with some contempt for my person," that, even at this distance of time, may be overheard. This was altogether too much for Blake. He therefore took the Dragoon by the elbows and ran him out of the garden. When the Dragoon began to threaten further, he took him by the elbows again, and ran him another fifty yards down the road, while the Dragoon tried to turn round to strike him, and " raged and cursed," and all the neighbours ran out to see the sight. In fact, he seems to have continued to run him down the road to the Fox Inn, where the Dragoon was quartered ; and there he left the struggling and astonished Dragoon ; for the proprietor of the Fox Inn was his landlord and friend.

For this he was brought before the Bench of Justices. There he was bewildered to learn that the Dragoon had sworn that while he had been run down the road his attacker had said : " Damn the King, damn all his subjects, damn his soldiers, they are all slaves : when Bonaparte comes it will be cut-throat for cut-throat, and the weakest must go to the wall : I will help him." To be sure, that was a comprehensive political doctrine to have delivered in such breathless circumstances. On this charge he was remanded ; and it was Hayley who stepped forward to find bail for him. In writing to Butts to tell him of the matter, therefore, Blake says simply : " Burn what I have peevishly written about any friend."

The trial did not come forward until January of the following year. By then Blake had left Felpham, and had taken lodgings in London. He was then acquitted ; but the Dragoon had earned fame for himself. His name was John Scholfield ; and he became one of the twelve sons of Albion after his fall, in a variety of spellings. Not till *Jerusalem* was revised did he take his full place in Blake's mythological system, together with other characters of the trial ; but, in the spelling of Scofield, he also appears once in *Milton,* together with Hayley, in the spelling of Hyle.[1]

[1] See Plate 93.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTELLECTUAL VISION (1803-1809)

I

The three years that Blake spent at Felpham form the most critical period of his life. Except for changing and re-ordering what he had already written, he wrote, with one astonishing exception, no more verse that has survived. In the absence of dates for them, it is impossible to speak with assurance of his pictures, but it is at least certain that, after this time, he used tempera only on rare occasions. His chief work henceforward was done by engraving and by water-colour drawing; but in these he now found a new form for the expression of his thought. He had come almost to his full intellectual stature. There was little to be added to his vision of life, except to temper, refine and simplify it. This he did in part by certain prose pieces written in exposition of the ideas underlying his pictures, in proof that his designs were intended to be studied for their ideas, that they were not only pictorial representations. He did it chiefly by drawing or engraving pictures in series, each entire series carrying the symbolism of his ideas. By working in this way he attained a simplicity, purity and coherence of thought, as well as of expression, hardly to be suspected of the author of the Prophetic Books, though not inappropriate to the author of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

Felpham was the turning-point. On his return to London he took lodgings at 17 South Molton Street, and once again looked for work from the booksellers. Hayley, full of kindness as always, wrote to him, "Do not fear you can want employment"; and Blake continued to work for him. He went again to Johnson and to Fuseli; and was commissioned by the former to engrave designs made by the latter. In his letters he mentions rates of payment for this work; and it is evident that his commercial value had substantially advanced. He thus quickly found employment. In fact seems to have been so busy during the first year after his return that his supply of pictures for the Butts' collection ceased for a time.

Oddly enough, in spite of his furious efforts during the previous two years to be gone out of Felpham, the first effect of his return to London seems to have been to withdraw him altogether from his creative work. The truth, however, is exactly the reverse of the seeming. One of the causes of his fury in Felpham probably was that he could not begin the printing of his "grandest poem." His first task on his return to London,

after he had seen Johnson and Fuseli and found immediate work to do, was to begin on the heavy labour of printing his poem. The title-pages of both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are dated 1804; *Jerusalem* also bears the address of " Sth. Molton Street." The address *To The Public* on Plate 3 of *Jerusalem* declares that " After my three years' slumber on the banks of the Ocean, I again display my Giant forms to the Public." These words are repeated from his letter to Butts of April, 1803, where he first referred to the composition " in these years " of " an immense number of verses on one grand theme."

He, therefore, had lost no time in beginning on the work he desired to do without fear of Hayley running into the cottage at any moment. He was again master of his own time and privacy; and he spent these on the heavy labour of preparing his verses. This was true creative labour in every sense. It did not consist merely in writing verses from a prepared manuscript in reverse on a copper plate. *Milton* was revised in several places—on one plate to immortalise the Royal Dragoon. Blake was therefore by no means as subservient to the " immediate dictation " as he suggested to Butts. Probably the actual lines themselves were under constant revision as they took their last shape on copper. Yet the lines were but part of the combined effect he desired. The decorations and illustrations had to be made; and in these, in both these poems, his imagination was at fullest stretch. They contain some of his most astonishing designs; and whether he made preliminary sketches for them, or not, their execution, in all that mattered of particular organisation, took shape directly on the plate.

His work on the plates, therefore, kept him in a state of continual imaginative excitement. To this the change of his original plan was probably due. That change of plan is suggested on the face of *Milton*. He had written " an immense number of verses "; and *Milton* does not contain an immense number of verses. Its title-page announces it as " A Poem in 12 Books," whereas only two books follow. In the most beautiful of his poems, with which he closes the " Preface " to *Milton*, he declares

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall the Sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant Land.

There, as has already been pointed out, he announces the theme of *Jerusalem* to follow; but the theme of *Jerusalem* does not follow. The con-

clusion from these things seems fairly apparent. Under the inspiration of Milton the theme of Spiritual Liberty had been conceived; therefore Blake had given his name as title to the original poem. As he worked on the poem, however, he decided to make two poems of his verses, and to give the separate title of Jerusalem to that part of the "immense number of verses" that carried the burthen of the poem.

In 1804, accordingly, directly he had finished the plates of *Milton*, he at once began the early plates of the poem now called *Jerusalem*.[1] Yet by that time two things had occurred. He had made slight changes in *Milton* that suggested even greater changes in the rest; and in the act of conceiving of the rest as a separate poem it had taken a new form in his mind. He therefore went to work more slowly with the rest. He seems, indeed, to have recast its form, and rewritten much of the matter, and to have spent years at the task. The people of the trial for sedition, held in January, 1804, are woven into the mythology. Writing to Hayley in December, 1805, he thanks him for having obtained "through your means a mild and pleasant slumber" of three years, and adds that "it will not be long before I shall be able to present the full history of my spiritual sufferings to the dwellers upon earth and of the spiritual victories obtained for me by my friends." Yet, in 1810, in his *Public Address*, he is still found writing of the "poem concerning my three years' herculean labours at Felpham which I shall soon publish." Quite possibly the plates were completed

[1] The paper on which the known copies of *Milton* was printed has the watermark of 1808; but, as Blake himself stated that he did not print copies until he had found buyers for them, this does not mean that the plates were not completed long before. He would hardly have begun the first plate of *Jerusalem* before he was at least well forward with *Milton*, probably not until he had finished *Milton*. There is, in fact, strong internal testimony that this was what he did. On Plate 5 of *Jerusalem*, for example, he enumerates the sons of Albion as "Hand and Hyle and Coban, of Kwantok, Peachey, Brereton, Slayd and Hutton," "Scofield, Kox, Kotope and Bowen." Brereton was the justice who tried him at Petworth in September; Gwantock and Peachey were two of the justices who tried him at Chichester in January, 1804; Cock and Schofield's trooper-friend who testified at Chichester to Blake's alarming remarks while running Schofield down the road. Kotope and Bowen may have been other witnesses or functionaries at the trial at Chichester. On Plate 17 of *Milton* the only three of these who appear are Hyle, Coban and Schofield. Coban cannot be placed; but Hyle and Scofield we know. Their connection is with Felpham. On the face of the text, therefore, the suggestion is that Plate 17 of *Milton* was completed either before or not long after the trial at Chichester in January, 1804; that Plate 5 of *Jerusalem* was not made until after that trial; and that between the two the personages of the mythology had been entirely reorganised to include new enemies of the Inspired Man who had appeared at the trial.

before this time. In the one coloured copy that remains, its strange and wonderful beauty suggests that he spent years colouring it at his leisure ;[1] but it is evident also that he spent years before he brought it to the point when it could be coloured.

Thus, immediately following his return from Felpham, he was busy enough on the work he desired to do, in the intervals of earning a livelihood. He seems, perhaps partly as a result of the intellectual excitement in giving form to his poems, to have found a state of exaltation in every part of his life. His letters to Hayley during 1804 reveal the progress of that exaltation. In March, for example, he writes : " I curse and bless engraving alternately, because it takes up so much time and is so intractable, though capable of such beauty and proportion." Then, the following month he writes : " Endless toil is the true title of engraving, as I find by the things I have in hand day and night." Finally, in October, 1804, in a letter full of joy, he writes : " Oh ! the distress I have undergone, and my poor wife with me : incessantly labouring and incessantly spoiling what I had done well. Every one of my friends was astonished at my faults, and could not assign a reason ; they knew my industry and abstinence from every pleasure for the sake of study, and yet—and yet—and yet there wanted proofs of industry in my works. I thank God with entire confidence that it shall be so no longer—he is become my servant who domineered over me, he is even as a brother who was my enemy. Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth, and as I have not been for twenty dark, but very profitable, years. I thank God that I courageously pursued my course through dark ness."

2

At this moment Blake conceived his first series of designs—and received his bitterest disappointment. Ten years before, he had executed a number of illustrations for Young's *Night Thoughts ;* but those illustrations had each stood separately, exhibiting (or not exhibiting) the poem for which they were made. He now conceived the idea of a series of designs for Blair's poem *The Grave.* They purported to be illustrations of the poem. In fact, as their publisher himself afterwards described them, " detached from the Work they embellish they form of themselves a most interesting

[1] It is now in the possession of General Archibald Stirling, by whose courtesy and hospitality I was enabled to spend some days examining it.

Poem," displaying " the regular progression of Man, from his first descent into the Vale of Death to his last admission into Life eternal "—words which have a distant ring of Blake's own description of his project.

While he was at work on these designs Cromek, once himself an engraver, now a print-jobber, slunk into sight. He saw the designs, and commissioned Blake to make a set of forty drawings, the agreement being that Blake would engrave twenty of these for publication with the poem. On this understanding he paid Blake twenty guineas for the designs, which were drawn in sepia. Having gained possession of the designs, Cromek made other plans for their publication. Apparently he did not approve of the severe style of engraving Blake had learnt from Basire. He therefore turned to Schiavonetti, a fashionable engraver of the hour, and commissioned him to engrave twelve of the designs.

Thus Blake was trebly robbed. He had sold his designs at a nominal price on the agreement that he would be commissioned to engrave them. He had been looking forward eagerly to the joy of executing his own designs by the very strokes and scores of the graver for which they had been devised. Of both these he was robbed ; but he was robbed also of the designs themselves, and of their copyright. Some of the designs that were not used in the engraving have survived ;[1] but the majority of these, as well as all but one of those that were used, have been lost. Blake's reply, under the circumstances, was brief enough ; but it was effective. He set it down in his notebook :—

> A petty sneaking knave I knew—
> O ! Mr. Cromek, how do ye do?

In its purely worldly aspect the nature of the robbery can be best discovered by Cromek's own statement that Blake and his wife were at this time " reduced so low as to be obliged to live on half a guinea a week."

The world's loss is not less than Blake's. If it be the highest quality in art to aspire to the condition of music, Blake in these designs achieved that quality. Never before had he made designs of such loveliness. They rank with his greatest work, and their perfect beauty is inspired by the thought they expressed. The infinite reluctance of the parting of the soul and the body, and the fierce rapture of their reunion, are not separate beauties, for they are part of one and the same thought. If the entire series of forty designs were available, set forth in their sequence, a complete and coherent poem would unfold itself, greater perhaps, because simpler and

[1] Plate 6 is evidently one of them.

purer, than any that Blake wrought in his Prophetic Books. Of this Cromek has robbed the world. The book was published in 1808, bringing profit to Cromek in which Blake was not to share ; and again in 1813 ; with prefatory eulogies of three persons : Blair, the poet, Schiavonetti, the engraver, and Cromek, the publisher. The only person who did not receive a prefatory eulogy was Blake, the designer ; and the only value of the book to-day is that which he conferred on it.

While this evil transaction was being plotted, Cromek was in the habit of visiting Blake. There he saw a new work on which Blake was engaged. This was a pencil drawing showing in procession all the characters of Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*. The conception was one likely to hit the popular taste, but not (as Cromek had already decided) if engraved by Blake. He therefore carried the idea to Stothard, instructing him to execute a similar design for Schiavonetti to engrave. In this case[1] Blake's complaint was loud and fierce. He completed the picture in tempera in 1809 ; and in 1810 he published, from his brother's address in Broad Street, prints from his engraving. He also wrote, by way of an exposition of the picture, an exposition of Chaucer's poem which Charles Lamb judged to be the best criticism of it he had read.

3

Blake was now indeed " drunk with intellectual vision." In the letter of October, 1804, in which he had described himself thus, he stated the immediate cause of his exaltation. " Suddenly on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures, I was again enlightened with the light I enjoyed in my youth, and which has for exactly twenty years been closed from me as by a door and by window-shutters." This was about the time when he had, presumably, finished *Milton*, and had begun, or was about to begin, on *Jerusalem*. Whatever the cause of this sudden illumination, this vivid exaltation of being (such as he had not known, he says, since he first set up business as a printseller in Broad Street), the evidences are many enough. It expressed itself in the manner natural and proper to his mind, in design and colour. When he was least sure of himself, he wrote difficult poems. When he was most sure of himself, he drew lucid pictures. The matter he had to express in each was

[1] Stothard had another side to tell in the story. In any event, it is certain that he knew nothing of Blake's design. He stated that Blake first saw the design in his studio. Their two tales are contradictory ; but the wry figure of Cromek on either side would of itself incline a healthy instinct to the other.

essentially the same; but the manner of one was a frustration, whereas the manner of the other was a communication. Now that he had, so mysteriously, attained illumination of his whole being, he put forth, in the years that followed, a great number of pictures, singly and in series, full of beauty and intellectual light.

The mere number of those that are dated, to say nothing of the larger number that are undated, is testimony to a new, enormous joy in creation. A number of those that are undated can with assurance be assigned to this period, not only because of internal likeness, but because of another sign of his rapidity of work at this time. He had now begun to work at his pictures in series, as though no one picture could contain all the thought he desired to convey, a thought that therefore had to utter itself in a connected series of pictures. This same overflowing of thought from one design into another, and yet again into another, till it completed itself, and made a unity of the whole, is now found in exercise even where there is no external unity within which to group a sequence of designs. It is as if one picture suggested another on a cognate theme, which he had at once to begin, even when the suggestion was accidental to the designs themselves, not prompted by a coherent thought he wished to convey.

For example, in 1805, he opened the book of Exodus, and at once began drawing his great series illustrating the Plagues of Egypt, running on into scenes from the wilderness. Not being partial to either end of the Scriptures, in the same year he opened the Book of Revelation, and continued to illustrate it, turning the pages as he went. *The King of Babylon* and *The Four and Twenty Elders* bear the date of this year, and *The River of Life* and *Death on a White Horse*, without a date, are certainly work of this period. The power in all his drawings of this period is not equal, the inspiration not equally certain; but some of them are full of a strange visionary light, and none of them is a project such as any other man would have conceived. In the same year he made his forty designs for *The Grave;* and the titles of some of those that were not used, and have been lost, suggest subjects that are certainly remarkable. One would like, for example, to see the design which seems to have impressed Flaxman most, entitled: *The Gambols of Ghosts according with their Affections previous to the Final Judgment.* It is not surprising that Cromek rejected that particular design.

Blake appears during these years, in fact, to have worked steadily through both the Old and the New Testaments, and in this way he made, one by one, his series dealing with the life of Christ. Most of these were

undated. At Felpham, immediately after he had painted his pictures in tempera dealing with the infancy of Christ, he had sent Butts the first of these, *The Three Maries*. The remainder are certainly the work of this period, some as early as 1805, but the larger number probably about 1808. At this time he was at work on *Jerusalem*. There he expounded his own interpretation of Christ's mission in taking on mortality. It is not fanciful to see these ideas reflected in his water-colour drawings of the same period. Even had he not consciously put his philosophy into his designs, his hand would have been moved by a brain at labour on his poem. But Blake had symbols, types of face and form, postures of body, carefully devised, and ready to his hand, by which to display his dominant ideas in his pictures. These symbols would inevitably have been brought to service; and in certain of this series these symbols can be seen to be quite deliberately employed.

Unfortunately the entire series has been widely scattered. If they were gathered together, and set out in array, it is more than probable that they would be found to form as complete, if perhaps not so coherent, a poem as do his other complete series, giving his interpretation of the Life of Christ as revealing the strait, secret path of divine initiation and conquest. Hints of this can be seen in several of those that are available. In his water-colour drawing of *Angels Hovering over the Body of Jesus*, for example, he is clearly drawing his " vision of all Beulah hovering over the sleeper " as he had, years before this, already described it in *The Four Zoas*. In *The Hymn of Christ and His Apostles*, the company of the apostles is found, after the resurrection of conquest, singing and playing on musical instruments. But this design is the same as he used for the last plate of his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, fourteen years later, where Job and his family are found in the very same manner celebrating their conquest over experience and evil. Coincidences such as these are not accidental from a mind as systematic as Blake's was in its search for symbols to utter his vision of life.

In others of the series the correspondence is not so clear. Yet, knowing what the life of Christ meant in Blake's vision of the mystery of salvation, knowing, too, the types of physiognomy that he used for his personages in his Prophetic Books, it is not hard in *The Betrayal* to see the figure of Los confronting Urizen. The idea, at least, is present. The correspondence perceptible between his last Prophetic Books and his drawings of this period, particularly in this great series, is the more interesting to note because it followed on certain other series of drawings that he made

at this time, in which the reference from one to the other is more obvious.

4

In 1804 Blake finished *Milton*. There he told how Milton had come to him, to enter into him, and to dictate his song. Seventeen years before this, in 1787, Blake had recorded his first revolt against Milton. "Those who restrain Desire," he had written in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or Reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling. . . . The history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*, and the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah. . . . But in the Book of Job, Milton's Messiah is called Satan. . . . The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and of God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it." Twenty-one years after this, in 1825, Crabb Robinson records Blake as saying: "I saw Milton in imagination, and he told me to beware of being misled by his *Paradise Lost*. In particular he wished me to shew the falsehood of his doctrine that the pleasure of sex arose from the Fall. The Fall could not produce any pleasure."

Plainly this is a reference, not merely to the poem *Milton*, where the poet appears "in imagination" to Blake, but also to *Jerusalem*, where the "falsehood of doctrine" is copiously, if not always lucidly, exposed. In both poems the "Governor or Reason is called Satan" as in the *Book of Job*; and a new way of salvation expounded as revealed in Christ. The Fall is undone, he proclaims, not by the prohibitions of Reason, as Milton had taught, but by unifying all the warring attributes of Man. This was the theme of both poems. It was the theme Milton had taught him. Blake therefore prepared to render thanks. He did so by celebrating their collaboration, not merely in his own poems, but by making designs in illustration of Milton's poems, designs that were also corrections of the errors in them against which he had been warned by their author.

Consider how he approaches this task. The poem *Milton* was finished in 1804, and the rewritten *Jerusalem* begun. While he was at work on *Jerusalem*, in 1806, he made what seems to have been the first of his designs for *Milton*. It is a single separate drawing; and the title, subject and treatment are significant. It is entitled *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*. In it, Satan, who in the *Book of Job* is the Governor or Reason, appears like a satyr. He floats, wingless, above the endear-

ments of the pair. He holds his head in his hands, and looks with horror on the "pleasures of sex" here found in exercise before the Fall. But he is powerless, for in this design the Serpent (Blake's constant symbol for Materialism, the world of Reason's perverted dominion) is held beneath Adam's right foot, and eats mild herbiage, thinking no evil, oblivious of the happy pair.

The connected thought in all this is patent. Blake was not working at random. His symbols were carefully chosen. As a separate design Blake expressed in this drawing all he desired. It is the counterpart to *Jerusalem*. But now observe the development of his thought. The following year, 1807, he made his first series of designs for *Paradise Lost*. Not satisfied with these, in 1808, he made another series. The second series is incomparably finer than the first.[1] The first is indifferently done; the second is in the highest rank of his work. In both he used his design of 1806; but he introduced changes that are of extraordinary significance.

He could not now express his meaning in a single design. He had to look ahead for Milton's story of the Fall. Note the changes by which this is accomplished. In both the *Paradise Lost* series the Serpent is no longer seen under Adam's foot. No longer are its countenance and occupation beneficent. It is found coiled about a winged Satan in the air. With one hand Satan points to the sight of sportive innocence, with the other he embraces the Serpent while he seeks its counsel. He looks rueful, the Serpent resourceful and cunning, while the two plot how to undo these innocent "pleasures of sex." That is a significant change; but there are others also. In the design of 1806 the entire scene had been enclosed in a happy garden. In the two *Paradise Lost* series, on one side in the distance the sun sets beneath a sea of waters (another familiar symbol with Blake to signify the fall of poetic inspiration under the waters of Materialism), while on the other a crescent moon rises to throw a pale, reflected light. Thus, in both series, the original design is fitted into its place in the story, to prepare for the pending tragedy; but the original thought is preserved of the "pleasures of sex" found in exercise before the Fall. The only difference in Blake's use of this design in the two series is that Satan's position, and the positions of the sun and moon, are reversed. But there are other changes in the two series, for as he worked Blake's thought developed. These other changes are not less significant.

The first series consists of twelve designs, the second of nine. Eight of these are identical in each, save that the first are weak and show signs

[1] This is the series reproduced in the present volume.

of haste, whereas the second are strong and finely executed. During 1807 Blake had apparently received an order for two pictures from the Countess of Egremont, through the good offices of Ozias Humphrey, the miniature painter. For this order he did *The Last Judgment*, a fuller treatment of the last of his designs for *The Grave ;* and the amazing *Satan Summoning his Legions*.[1] This last had been one of the designs for the first *Paradise Lost* series ; but in the tempera-painting it is given quite another strength, pride and energy. It therefore disappears in the second series. In the remaining three designs the difference of conception between the two series are most marked. One of those that appears in the first, but not in the second, is entitled *Satan, Sin and Death at the Gate of Hell*. This is a part of Milton's mythological system ; but not part of Blake's ; and it is therefore dropped. The second is entitled *The Condemnation of Adam and Eve*. On this, too, Blake had other things to say (other things which, in *Jerusalem*, he was, in fact, saying) ; and it is also dropped. The third is entitled *Satan's Entry into Paradise ;* and for this Blake, in the third design of his second series, made quite another drawing, closer to Milton, less repetitive of other of the designs. In general, therefore, the changes are such as to make Blake less dependent on Milton, more fully expressive of himself, and of that which he wished to utter.

In the *Paradise Regained* series he expressed himself even more fully. This series is undated ; but it would be surprising if it did not immediately follow the *Paradise Lost* series, first or second. In execution it seems to stand between the two. Its close connection with the Life of Christ series suggests the link in thought and work between the two. *The Temptation*, in the Life of Christ series, is in fact an epitome of the subject treated more fully, and with some necessary dependence on Milton's poem, in the *Paradise Regained* series. But there are correspondences between the two that quite remarkably show Blake on a way of thought, searching for symbols to express that way of thought, that he was not to mature, and perfectly to marry one to the other, until he came to make his *Job* designs.

The subject, in *Paradise Regained*, was one of great natural appeal to Blake, and called for the use of symbolism. Here was the theme of Christ's initiation, a subject with which his reading had made him familiar, beginning with the lustral rite, passing to the sore probation, ending with the return home for the very discipline of service and experience he was afterwards to treat in his larger series. Here in *The First Temptation* is the opposition of the same two figures resembling Los and Urizen, of

[1] Plates 7 and 9.

The Betrayal in the Life of Christ series. In each case the opposition announces the theme of a contest in the heavens to follow. The likeness between *Satan in Council* and the second plate of *Job, The Fire of God is Fallen from Heaven,* is more adventitious perhaps. But in *Christ's Troubled Dream* a curious forecast of the *Job* illustrations is found.

Here, in fact, is the same subject, with the same symbols, at the same point in the probation, as in Plate 11 of *Job,* "With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me and affrightest me with Visions." In each appears the sleeping figure. Above each, with arms outstretched, glowers what appears to be the figure of God, seeking to terrify the sleeper with vengeances and punishments. No true God is this, however. This is the God of the world's religious institutions, whom to overthrow is the beginning of spiritual life. In the *Paradise Regained* series this terrible and terrifying figure is not easy to understand, but in *Jerusalem,* on which he was at work, the exposition is given unmistakably :—

> Turning his back to the Divine Vision, his Spectrous
> Chaos before his face appear'd, an Unformed Memory.
>
> Then Spoke the Spectrous Chaos . . .
>
> I am your Rational Power, O Albion ! and that Human Form
> You call Divine, is but a Worm seventy inches long,
> That creeps forth in a night and is dried in the morning sun,
> In fortuitous concourse of memorys accumulated and lost.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> So spoke the Spectre to Albion ; he is the Great Selfhood
> Satan, Worship'd as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth.

In the margin of Plate 11 of *Job* the meaning is put beyond doubt. There Blake writes : "Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light and his Ministers into Ministers of Righteousness."

The identity of symbol is complete in other parts of these two designs. In both appear the Serpent of Materialism, torturing the sleeper. Here a development appears. In *Paradise Regained* the serpents are several, and have no connection with the "Great Selfhood," other than being part of his terror. In *Job* the serpent is one, and is coiled about the Spectre. In both, moreover, the design marks the culmination of Satan's temptations. After each the initiate mounts steadily upward, in one case to the *Hymn of Job and his Family,* and in the other to the *Hymn of Christ and His Apostles* of the later Life of Christ series. The striking identity of symbol

and design in both these subjects is proof that Blake was already working on the problem of evil, that troubled him in the Prophetic Books, but was not brought to simple resolution until he came to make his *Job* designs.

Having done *Paradise Regained* Blake passed to Milton's other poems. The *Hymn on the Nativity*, obviously suggested itself. Of this he made two sets of drawings, the figures and designs of which look backward and forward to Blake's other work. The beautiful recumbent figure of Nature in *The Descent of Peace*[1] is the very figure of Eve, over whom Satan and the Serpent triumph in the Colour-printed Drawing of *Satan Exulting over Eve*.[2] The one tells the story of the Fall; the other of Salvation. The likeness between the design of *The Shepherds and the Angels*[3] and the great invention in *Job* of *The Morning Stars Sang Together* is present for all to see.

After this Blake continued to illustrate Milton's poems. *Comus*, *l'Allegro* and *il Penseroso* were all taken in their turn; but the designs in these are all of a different order. They are the fruit of his fancy. Not to them does he bring the flame of imagination. They were rather an exercise than a necessity to him. Sometimes, especially in the *Comus* series, he comes very near to bursting the artifice that was required by searching for the depth and strength natural to him; but in the illustrations to these lesser poems he was most successful when he was least characteristically himself. They were his salute to his master. They were not, as were the others, his hand's grip with a collaborator.

[1] Plate 35. [2] Plate 12. [3] Plate 36.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FATAL EXHIBITION (1809)

I

These years from 1803 to about 1809 or 1810 are among the most fruitful of Blake's life. The dark cloud of Cromek's trickery falls across it. As he was still in correspondence with Cromek in April or May of 1807, in an attempt to get him to use his design for the dedication of *The Grave*[1], it was doubtless the discovery of the trick that had been played him that caused him to write the forlorn sentence in his notebook: "Tuesday, Jany 20, 1807, between Two and seven in the Evening, Despair." Yet, in spite of such hours of despair, these years were full of intellectual light and the joy of creation. This is evident, not only by the wealth of his production during these years, but by the power of his invention, by the clarity and strength of his vision and by the mysterious light that shines in so many of his designs of these fruitful years.

Yet this period held a hint of coming trouble, trouble that could hardly have been foretold till it came. During these years he had, it is true, by the good service of friends, such as Ozias Humphrey and George Cumberland, found new buyers for some of his pictures. But these buyers had not continued. A wider circle had not been won. Moreover, distance had come between him and Flaxman, apparently over Cromek, for Flaxman had recommended Cromek to Hayley for employment. In May, 1808, Flaxman wrote to a friend: "At present I have no intercourse with Mr. Blake."

He was dependent, for the sale of his work, mainly from the faithfulness of Thomas Butts. In July, 1803, when preparing to leave Felpham, he had written to that friend: "I will relinquish any engagement of designing at all unless left altogether to my own judgment, as you, my dear friend, have always left me; for which I shall never cease to honour and respect you." These words explain why he was happy to be dependent from Butts' faithfulness. A *Debtor and Creditor Account*, sent by Blake to Butts, dated March 3, 1806, has survived to show how complete that dependence was. Butts is found sending him "coals," the value of which is duly entered; buying Colour-printed Drawings done in 1795; buying copies of the Prophetic Books done at the same time; buying new water-colour drawings from the Old and New Testaments; and paying twenty-five guineas in

[1] Plate 6.

advance on account of the year 1806 for teaching his son drawing. This account is a solitary survival. There is even stronger evidence. The larger part of his work of these years, both of drawings which are dated, and those which are undated but certainly belong to this period, found its way to Butts' repository.

No man could continue buying on this scale indefinitely. The mere lack of space to contain his purchases would in time cry an end to his capacity, especially with an artist as copious as Blake now was. It is therefore significant to note that after about 1810 or 1811 Butts ceased buying as he had done; and that of the drawings made during these years the long series of twelve from *Paradise Regained* remained without a buyer for at least another ten years. It is also not without significance that Blake's larger pictures of this period remained without a buyer.

2

It may be but a coincidence that this was the moment when Blake decided to hold in 1809 the first public exhibition of his work. Another cause moved him to the same end. Cromek had taken Stothard's design for his *Canterbury Pilgrims* on tour through the country; and Blake desired to make his own design known. This desire would hardly of itself have been sufficient to prompt him to hold, now for the first time, what his *Catalogue* describes as a "Public Inspection" of his pictures. More likely the true cause was a warning from Butts that a time was approaching when he would not be able to take more pictures. It is evident that such a time was approaching, and it is a fact that within a year or so that time came.

In May, 1809, Blake published (if printing a sheet for circulation among his own friends may be described as publication) an *Advertisement* for a forthcoming exhibition of his works. In it he revealed that he had not been quietly content during these years to depend from Butts. "The execution of my Designs," he wrote, "being all in Water-colours (that is, in Fresco) are regularly refused to be exhibited by the *Royal Academy*, and the British Institution has, this year, followed its example, and has effectually excluded me by this Resolution; I therefore invite those Noblemen and Gentlemen, who are its Subscribers, to inspect what they have excluded: and those who have been told that my Works are but an unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman's Scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide." He had, therefore, again sought for entry at the official exhibitions

before he came to the decision to hold an independent exhibition, necessarily limited by his poor resources and opportunity.

The exhibition was held at his brother's house in Broad Street. It was not an excellent place for an exhibition ; but what could he do ? He was tied by his necessities. But it must be admitted that he did not display much worldly wisdom in other matters. The best of his work hung in Butts' house. It is hard to believe that some of these would not have attracted attention, had but one or two persons of influence been induced to see them—as certain persons of influence did come to his exhibition, even as it was. A modern artist would have hung these too, to make a goodly show ; and would have marked them all as sold, to make a striking impression of an avid purchasing public, the thriving beginnings of popularity, in order to induce others to follow the new fashion.

These wiles of a profession were not native to Blake. He opened his *Catalogue* with *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* and *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth*, beyond question pretty strong meat for his generation, at least for a beginning of their feast. The next was his tempera-painting of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. For this he issued a *Prospectus*, offering engravings at four guineas each, two on subscription and two on completion and delivery. In this he threatened that " the price will be considerably raised to non-subscribers," a further indication of the simplicity of his guile. Two of the most remarkable were *Satan Summoning His Legions* and *The Ancient Britons*. The first he described as " an experiment," being his first composition, as he says " bruised and knocked about without mercy, to try all experiment," for a " more perfect Picture executed for a Lady of high rank." The second represented, as his description in his *Catalogue* indicates, a theme taken from *Jerusalem*. This must have been a picture of some size, for the *Catalogue* speaks of the figures in it being " full as large as life." With four others shown at the exhibition, it has now been lost. The loss is heavy, for according to the description and discussion of it in the *Catalogue* it seems to have been painted to express some of his most distinctive ideas. Two of the pictures, *The Bard* and *The Penance of Jane Shore*, were work of thirty years before, that had remained on his hands. A few came from his recent period, and rank with his best work, such as *The Body of Abel found by Adam and Eve, Soldiers Casting Lots for Christ's Garment, Jacob's Ladder*, and *Angels Hovering over the Body of Jesus in the Sepulchre*.[1]

[1] Plates 78, 46, 80, and 48.

In all sixteen pictures were exhibited. These sixteen were probably pictures that, because of their size and incompleteness, or because they were recent work, he had been unable to sell. Whatever dictated their inclusion, he did himself a serious injustice in his selection. " The Enquiry in England," he wrote about this time in his marginal notes to Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses*, " is not whether a Man had Talents and Genius, but whether he is Passive and Polite and a Virtuous Ass." This is a candid summary. At least, Blake was not passive or polite, and he energetically denied virtue. As for the rest, he showed no wisdom in helping the public enquiry to extend to him by displaying the best and purest of his wares. At no time would anyone from such an exhibition have formed any conception of the long gallery of beauty and power of design the artist had already completed.

3

Some there were who went to the exhibition and saw hints of new, incommensurable genius. These included some notable names. Their testimonies took very different forms; though they all meant the same thing. The first to go, apparently, was Crabb Robinson, the friend of great men. He was a perspicacious fellow, and bought four Catalogues, having glanced at one of them—an act that greatly astonished James Blake, who at once promised him free entry to the exhibition for ever. One of these he gave to his friend Charles Lamb, who declared that " Blake's description was the finest criticism he had ever read of Chaucer's poem." Charles Lamb appears as a consequence to have visited the exhibition himself, for in a letter dated May 15, 1824, he stated that he had " seen his paintings " and described one of them shown at the exhibition. They were, he wrote, " marvellous strange pictures, visions of his brain which he asserts that he has seen "—words which imply that he talked with Blake. " I must," he adds, " look on him as one of the most extraordinary persons of the age." He calls him Robert Blake; and wonders where he is, " for the man is flown, whither I know not, to Hades, or a Mad House." At least he had not, after fifteen years, flown from Charles Lamb's memory after that one casual glimpse, and that is something of a tribute to both men. If Charles Lamb had but followed that sure instinct further. there might have been another tale to tell for the dark years that were to follow.

Perhaps it was Charles Lamb who sent his friend Robert Southey, who afterwards wrote of " that painter of great but insane genius, William Blake,"

He described *The Ancient Britons* as " one of the worst pictures, which is saying much." Seymour Kirkup also went, and described *The Ancient Britons* as " the very noblest of all Blake's works "—a quiet tribute also to the other works. Seeing who Robert Southey and Seymour Kirkup were, these two expressions of their minds meant precisely the same thing. Leigh Hunt also seems to have gone, for an attack on the exhibition appeared in *The Examiner,* in which the pictures were described as " wretched " and the *Catalogue* as " a farrago of nonsense, unintelligibleness and egregious vanity, the wild effusions of a distempered brain." This, too, is the same thing, with a Cockney accent.

4

These visitors brought no help to Blake ; but they have at least helped to preserve copies of the *Descriptive Catalogue* he wrote for the exhibition. It appears from a letter to George Cumberland, dated December, 1808, that just before the exhibition he was about to publish a book containing his thoughts on Art. " I have the satisfaction to inform you," he wrote, " that I have myself begun to print an account of my various Inventions in Art, for which I have procured a publisher, and am determined to pursue the plan of publishing, that I may get printed without disarranging my time, which in future must alone be designing and painting." These words intimate that *Jerusalem* was finished ; and that he had concluded that henceforward he would more truly utter his vision of life in design and colour than by verse. Having this in view, he had written a book of Art criticism, to make his way clear before him. In the *Advertisement* for the forthcoming exhibition he referred again to this book. Writing of his " fresco painting," he says, " The Art has been Lost : I have recovered it. How this was done, will be told, together with the whole Process, in a Work on Art, now in the Press." Again in the *Descriptive Catalogue* he refers to his enquiry " in another work on Painting " into the villainous invention of oil colours.

Two of these references state quite explicitly that a work on Art by him was actually being printed ; and there is no reason to question the statement. The book never appeared. Perhaps the failure of the exhibition slew it. Perhaps the death of bookseller Johnson in December, 1809, shortly after the exhibition, brought an end to it. Perhaps the two played their parts together. At any rate, the Work on Art, like so much else of Blake's work, has been lost. All that has remained, among pub-

lished works, are the *Advertisement* of the exhibition, the *Descriptive Catalogue* for the exhibition, and the little *Prospectus of the Engraving of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims* distributed at the exhibition. In addition to these, there are a number of disjointed writings in his notebook that roughly fall together in two parts, one dealing with his picture *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and the other with a large picture, seven feet by five, entitled *A Vision of the Last Judgment*.[1] These last two bave been somewhat arbitrarily divided, and entitled, respectively, a *Public Address*, because of certain words found in it, and *A Vision of the Last Judgment*.

It looks as if these scattered writings were his first notes for the lost Work on Art, possibly chapters or sections of it. There are indications in his notebook that in 1810 (by when, whether as a consequence of Johnson's death or the failure of the exhibition, or whatever else, no more is heard of the printing of the book) he desired that some of these notes should be added to the *Descriptive Catalogue* of the year before. Even this was not achieved. Not for another fifty-three years were these notes to be shaped into some manner of sequence and coherence, and published under the titles that have been given. In the course of the first appear the words from which its title was chosen: "Resentment for Personal Injuries has had some share in this Public Address, But Love to my Art and Zeal for my Country a much Greater." These certainly look exceedingly like words from the book in which Blake intended to declare his philosophy of Art.

What Blake meant to do as a painter followed as a natural consequence from what Blake meant to be as a man in a world of baffled meanings. There were no separations or divisions in his life. His vision of life governed everything, even the guidance of his pencil in a design. His practice in Art was decreed, in truth, not merely by his philosophy, but by the particular doctrines in which he had expressed that philosophy. Not always was he wise in this obedience to his doctrine; but at least he was fiercely consistent and complete. That is why the loss of his book is so heavy. All that remains of it, and of the thoughts that went into it, are to be found in the *Advertisement*, the *Catalogue*, the *Public Address* and the *Vision of the Last Judgment*; and these four group themselves somewhat tragically around the failure of his exhibition.

[1] This is not, of course, the picture for the Countess of Egremont, reproduced on Plate 8. It has been lost or destroyed. What appears to have been a preparatory sketch for it is in Professor Bateson's possession. Other sketches of the same kind are in existence.

5

Blake believed that the life of Man was the supreme reality in a world of illusion. Not without, but within, was Man to search for the lineaments of eternity. Everything that was without was but a false pattern of that which was within. When the phantasm of the visible world will be rolled up like a scroll, the realities in Man's imagination will abide, imperishable, because part of the spiritual structure of Eternity, not a mere phantasm of Time and Space. Time and Space are themselves but illusions; and without the unity of these twain the illusion of matter would not exist to cheat Man to a false sense of stability. Everything perceived by Man's senses (he might almost have been expressing the latest searchings of Science) was something other than it appeared to be. It was rapidly changing. He who set out to paint that which he saw was painting that which had already ceased to exist, had in fact never existed, since it was merely a fiction of the eye, and ultimately a shadow of the imagination.

> In your own bosom you bear your Heaven
> And Earth, and all you behold, tho' it appears Without it is within
> In your Imagination, of which this World of Mortality is but a shadow.

So he sang in *Jerusalem*.

He searched still more deeply. After all, what is this boasted Nature? What qualities has a mountain, as Man sees it, but those qualities that Man brings to it in the seeing? In fact, what is a mountain, or a river, but a Man's imaginative conception, and therefore a part of the life of his mind? He is the reality: not they. What are cities, but what Man conceived and made?

> . . . Cities
> Are Men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers and Mountains
> Are also Men; everything is Human, mighty, sublime!
> In every bosom a Universe expands as wings,
> Let down at will around and call'd the Universal Tent.

True, indeed, that men are content to dwell in the narrow world of their perception, this world of apparent mass and depth, light and shade, Time and Space, this world of visible things and things of abstracting reason. Yet they cannot wholly lose the Vision of Eternity. That vision, even when clouded, is still indefeasibly the natural function of Man's intellect. Of the grandeur of a mountain, or of the beauty of a river, Man thought and spoke. He did not stop to consider that the mountain and the river are

phantasms, always changing in their appearance, different things at different times to different observers. The grandeur and beauty are what he brought to the mountain and the river, the qualities by which mind knows mind, with which mind communicates with mind. Not only that. Man reasoned about the grandeur of a mountain. He sought to fix an ennoblement of his being into a form of rational death, therefore of non-entity. Thus men for ever ensnared their spiritual life in the illusion of their eyes or by the delusion of their reasoning minds: thinking of a mountain or seeking a definition for grandeur. Thus by their perceptions they narrowed their Visions of Eternity (inalienably theirs) into weak Visions of Time and Space; until it had become impossible to address them, by pen or pencil, without humouring them. It was left to Erin to tell this " to the Daughters of Beulah in soft tears ":—

> The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,
> Are become weak Visions of Time and Space, fix'd into furrows of death,
> Till deep dissimulation is the only defence an honest man has left.
> O Polypus of Death! O Spectre over Europe and Asia,
> Withering the Human Form by Laws of Sacrifice for Sin!

So he searched deeper yet. He gave completer expression to thoughts he had uttered in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Man not only had within him, inalienably, the possession of reality; but he was therefore holy. Everything that is eternal is holy. The Human Imagination, Blake says over and over again, is the Divine Body. That is to say, the Human Imagination is part of an Eternal Spiritual Life. It, therefore, reveals itself in intimations of Beauty. The function of Reason, divorced from Imagination by the Fall, is to destroy the Imagination (to exile Man from Beauty and Innocence, fruit of the Tree of Life) by the knowledge of good and evil, whereas all Man's energies are holy.

> The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man, and when separated
> From Imagination and closing itself as in steel in a Ratio
> Of the Things of Memory, it thence frames Law and Moralities
> To destroy Imagination, the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms and Wars.

Moralities are also, therefore, an illusion. There are such things as sin and righteousness, even as there are such things as mountains and rivers; but they are illusions. They are States through which the spiritual Individualities of men pass. Sin is a State of error; the error withers and perishes once it is recognised as an illusion; but the Individual is imperishable and holy in all his energies. The State of Sin exists in Time and Space;

but the life of the Spirit and the Imagination is eternal. To this Eternal Life Christ came to redeem Man. He stepped out of Eternity into Time and Space; re-knit in His own experience the warring members of the fallen body; and overcame every illusion, even the last illusion of death. He condemned error, in order that He might redeem the Individual. He broke the tables of the law, He preached eternal forgiveness, and unloosed the springs of life, giving freedom to every energy of Man. This He did, by overthrowing the dominion of that which is Without, and restoring the dominion of that which is Within.

This, therefore, said Blake, is the work of every Artist. The supreme decision required of every handler of pigment was whether he would in his Art seek to reproduce the illusion or the reality. Critical the decision, to himself and to every other. Over and over again in the Prophetic Books the refrain runs, "He became what he beheld." Once in *The Four Zoas* the refrain becomes graver still:—

> Terrified at the shapes
> Enslav'd humanity put on, he became what he beheld:
> He became what he was doing: he was himself transform'd.[1]

In the same poem the Eternal Man cries:—

> O how couldst thou deform those beautiful proportions
> Of life and person; for as the Person, so is his life proportioned.

Too often gross persons and stunted persons are the consequence of gross and stunted lives. They become so because, at either end of the scale, victors or victims of Materialism, they have steadfastly contemplated its illusion. The whole creation (as Blake constantly echoed the visionary Paul) was groaning and travailing, waiting for the manifestation of the Sons of God. He therefore resolved to contemplate and copy, not that which was groaning and travailing, waiting to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, but the glorious liberty of the world his imagination beheld, the world of the Sons of God. Thus, he, and those who with him beheld what he wrought, would become what he beheld, and would be themselves transformed.

> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a Ball,
> It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
> Built in Jerusalem's wall.

[1] So William James wrote of F. W. H. Myers in a penetrating and memorable sentence: "When a man's pursuit gradually makes his face shine and grow handsome, you may be sure it is a worthy one."

6

Such is the heart of vision from which are nourished the scattered members of his Work on Art. He announces it himself without hesitation. "The nature of my work," he says, in the *Vision of the Last Judgment*, "is visionary, or imaginative; it is an endeavour to restore what the Ancients called the Golden Age." "The World of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the Vegetated body. This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature." "Shall Painting," he asks, in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, "be confined to the sordid drudgery of fac-simile representations of merely mortal and perishing substances, and not be, as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of invention and visionary conception?" "Why," he asks, in the *Public Address*, "are Copiers of Nature incorrect, while Copiers of Imagination are correct?"

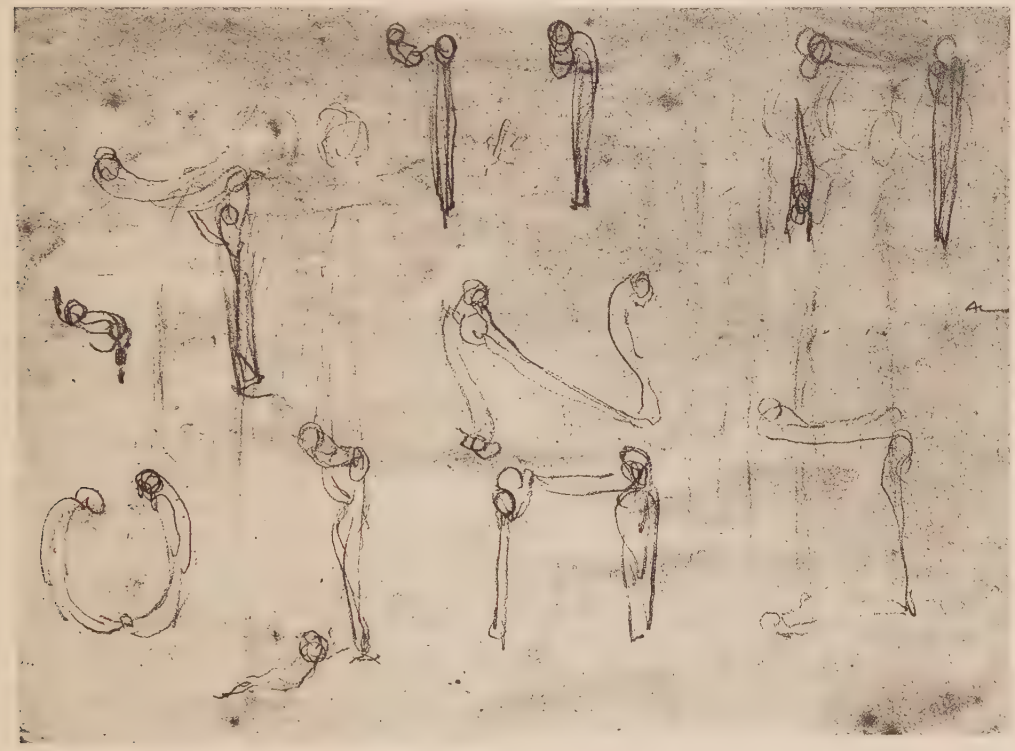
That is his constant theme. It was a theme that followed with sure step on the mental illumination he had enjoyed during the preceding years. Ten years before this he had attempted (in his own way) to build in colour a representation of the visible world. After another fifteen years he was, because of wise advice, to search for depth and solidity, mass and distance, from a careful study of his own masters among the early Italians. At the present moment he saw clearly, even vividly, before him, as he had seen it many years before, not the world of vegetation, but the world of imagination. This world had no extension in space. Its extension was in spirit. It lacked, therefore, the building of three dimensions. To compensate for that, it had the vividness of line. Without either one or the other it could not have been seen at all. From that, therefore, came the emphasis he gave to the need for sharpness of outline.

"The Prophets," he declared, accordingly, in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, "describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing

Above: PENCIL DRAWING BY WILLIAM BLAKE (about 1793). $7 \times 9\frac{3}{8}$.

The Whitworth Institute, Manchester.

Below: THE REVERSE SIDE, WITH SKETCHES OF 'PATTERNS.'



know what could be done with them when he needed them, for they were the mechanism of his expression.

7

Painting, poetry and music were to Blake " the three powers in Man of conversing with Paradise which the Flood did not sweep away." " Painting exists and exults in immortal thoughts." It had therefore to surrender, in his practice, traffic with mortality and perishing substances. " Mental things are alone real: what is called corporeal nobody knows of; its dwelling-place is a fallacy, and its existence an imposture." But since he appealed to the eye, in addressing mind with mind, he had need of line and pattern. His interest in these was constant, but his use of them varied greatly. Whatever his practice and experiment, it was inevitable that, since he abjured the endless forms that Nature takes, he should sometimes lean on the very simple and obvious symmetries of the *Angels Hovering over the Body of Jesus*, the *Christ Ministered to by Angels* and *The Stoning of Achan;* but he also invented the wave of angels in *God Answering Job out of the Whirlwind*, and the whirl of flames in *Paolo and Francesca*. In the Plagues of Egypt series his use of bounding lines is particularly skilful: *Famine*, with its long, flat lines bled of energy, *Plague*, with its lines all tortured, *Fire*, leaping with energy, and *Pestilence*, one of the most skilful patterns he ever made.

Of these things he had need, since he drew from that which was within, and did not appeal to that which was without. Those who painted the visible, vegetable world were often compelled to be indefinite. The light of Nature fell where the eye could not see. Not so the light of imagination. The visionary eye had to see all or nothing. It dared not be indefinite, in peril of disaster. That is why in the *Vision of the Last Judgment* (described as a " Stupendous Vision ") he urges: " I intreat, then, that the Spectator will attend to the Hands and Feet, to the Lineaments of the Countenances; they are all descriptive of Character, and not a line is drawn without intention, and that most discriminate and particular. As Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant, so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant—much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark." He was yet, in his *Job* illustrations, to prove how precisely such words as these were to be taken. The entire interpretation of the philosophy in those wonderful designs depends from an exact attention to just these particulars.

CHAPTER SIX

A FRIEND IN NEED (1810-1821)

I

The lost Work on Art was complete when Blake held his exhibition. He had also painted many pictures, made many designs, transfigured by imaginative power, lit by a strange light and quality. What he had written, designed and coloured, were the work of his richest period. Neither one nor the other was available for those who visited his exhibition. They had before them only the *Descriptive Catalogue*, where angry words, of conscious power foiled of recognition, were more conspicuous to casual reading than the deliberate philosophy of Art. They had before them only sixteen pictures, not the best, and certainly some of the most surprising, of his work. The Work on Art was not published. Even what appear to be parts of the work lay still (and were to continue to lie) in his notebook. The pictures hung in Butts' house, waiting till the sun would shine, and they be brought into the open air. Hardly surprising, then, with so little to be seen in evidence of so much that was shrouded, that even discriminating judges were baffled, and were left only with haunting memories of having looked over the edge of an astonishing world.

Certainly the exhibition was a failure in all that it was intended to achieve. Actually it announced an even deeper disaster. A few persons came, and passed away; and if their memories were troubled for good or ill because of Blake, they brought him no custom, and they gave him no testimony. They left him nothing—except, perhaps, bitterness. The exhibition continued from May till September. When it was closed, Blake was in a worse plight than if he had never held it.

Always, until this moment, Blake had nourished the assurance of public recognition. Without such an assurance no man could have continued to work; and his letters testify to it. Now he had dared for it, and had lost it. Whatever his courage, it was certain that the failure would cloud the light that had made the preceding years so productive. More than that. With his friends, and especially with his brother, that prospect had been the support of their faith—or hope, or even charity. Between him and them had been a thought of the sun that would yet shine to justify their faith. Now he had seemed to have destroyed that prospect. If they did not, however delicately, withdraw from him (for the world loves not a failure), he would certainly withdraw from them. These things have been so from the beginning, and they will continue so to the end.

A FRIEND IN NEED (1810–1821)

The human spirit, in its despairs, is an utterly lonely thing. Blake's very eagerness, his furious energy, his tempestuous conviction of worth, were waiting now to turn on him. Human nature being as it is, a space of desolation awaited Blake into which only one other could enter, and that was the spirit of his wife. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that we cannot enter it, or the period of time across which it fell. Blake seems quietly to have withdrawn into himself, and for some years to have passed almost completely out of sight. After the exhibition Butts continued to buy pictures, though sparingly, and only for a short while. He took *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, the occasion of so much contention, and *The Whore of Babylon*, done in the same year as the exhibition.[1] Others may have been bought by him during the next two years, for the entire Life of Christ series passed to him. These are mostly undated, but it seems unlikely that all of them could have been, with the other work of this time, completed before the end of the disastrous exhibition. Among the dated drawings, the last which can be definitely traced to have been bought by Butts bears the date of 1811. That date is of some meaning ; for it is the last point from which Blake passes almost out of sight, until he definitely reappears about 1817.

What friends he kept, what work he did, how he lived, are all matters half-hidden in the obscurity into which he passes. Ozias Humphrey died in March, 1810, four months after Johnson. Of his other friends, the only three who are found at the other end of the period still helping him are John Flaxman, Thomas Butts and George Cumberland. At this moment Flaxman, as he wrote, had " no intercourse " with him. Blake was not an easy man to help, it has been said. Men never are, who are conscious of great value that they can give, in face of a general rejection of that value ; and after the failure of his exhibition no man of Blake's temperament would have been easy to approach. Yet while these friends lived Blake would not go to absolute want, though it seems that he went nearer to it at this period than he had gone before.

Traces of such help are not wanting. They are, indeed, the only signs of him that appear. He had made his designs for the *Hymn for the Nativity* in 1809, the year after the second *Paradise Lost* series. It is at least most unlikely that he made his eight designs for *Comus*, and his twelve designs for *l'Allegro* and *il Penseroso* before that time. These were all bought by Butts. One of the designs for *l'Allegro*, entitled *Mirth and Her Companions*, appears to have been engraved about 1813. Between these dates, therefore, Butts seems still to have been a buyer. These designs were

[1] Plate 86.

much smaller in size than his earlier illustrations for Milton. Except for certain of the *Comus* series, there is no attempt to charge any of them with messages from Eternity. "Fable, or allegory," he had written in his *Vision of the Last Judgment*, "is a totally distinct and inferior kind of poetry. Vision, or Imagination, is a representation of what actually exists, really and unchangeably." In these designs he observed his own distinction.

Somewhere about 1814 or early in 1815 Flaxman once again stepped across this distance to his help. Ten years before, Blake had engraved three of Flaxman's designs for the second edition of the *Iliad*. Flaxman was now making a series of *Compositions from the Works, Days and Theogony of Hesoid* for the firm of Longman; and Blake, somewhat resentfully apparently, returned to the labour of engraving his friend's designs. They were published at the beginning of 1817. The year before, one of Wedgwood's books of designs had appeared, engraved by Blake; and here again Flaxman's hand is evident. About the same time appeared a work entitled *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, by Abraham Rees, with articles on Basso Relievo and on Sculpture by Flaxman. This work contained seven plates engraved by Blake. While on this task Blake made his drawing for the engraving of the Laocoön, about which he wrote his many sayings, among others that Money is "the life's blood of Poor Families." The engravings for this book have an additional interest, because in some of them, and in *Mirth and Her Companions*, Blake for the first time used stipple, both with and without line, in his engraving.

These are scanty signs of one who, a few years before, had been found full of light and joy. They are not happy signs to see. Be sure, they were infinitely less happy matters to experience. He continued, of course, at his creative work. That scarcely needs to be said. For him not to do this, would have been for him to lay down his life; and he did, in fact, continue at work on his death-bed. But nothing of such work is known; except that sometime after 1813 he printed two copies each of *Europe* and *America*, for the paper on which these copies were printed have the watermark of this year. In 1808, George Cumberland had been seen seeking customers for these books. Possibly it was through George Cumberland these orders now came. At least it was through George Cumberland that Blake was now to be introduced to a new friend by whose help he returned to the light.[1]

[1] Perhaps during these years of obscurity he wrote other Prophetic Books. Crabb Robinson records that, among his conversations with Blake in 1826, he once "enquired

2

In 1818, a new friend came into Blake's life in the personality of John Linnell. A better friend no artist ever had. Blake had had good friends before. Amid all the disasters life had strewn about his days, the precious, if rare, virtue of friendship had not been denied him, from her who at home gave the name to all friendship, to those who came to help him when he had need of them. Flaxman, it is clear, loved him, though Blake did not always esteem the manner of the loving. His designs reveal Flaxman, and therefore reveal the character of his friendship. Both were uninspired, but both were quite decisive. Butts had been a tried friend; and during Blake's great years of illumination, after his return from Felpham, he had, as Samuel Palmer said, "stood between the greatest designer in England and the workhouse." But neither of these two men had brought with their friendship the precious gift of patient understanding, to turn the metal of their admiration into wrought gold. A faint light struggles through the few letters that passed between Blake and George Cumberland to suggest that something of this rare quality was present in that other friend; but George Cumberland lived at Bristol, and sympathy and understanding are flowers that do not always successfully throw their perfume from afar.

This new gift, that Blake had never received before, John Linnell was now to bring him. In all outward matters he was to be for the rest of Blake's life what Butts had been at an earlier period: the bulwark between Blake and the workhouse. Yet there was a deep difference, and the difference was of the spirit. Butts had never attempted to enter Blake's life of the spirit. He had stood outside its vast concerns, in an admiration wrinkled

about his writings." Blake replied: "I have written more than Voltaire or Rousseau—six or seven epic poems as long as Homer, and twenty tragedies as long as Macbeth." "I write," he added, "when commanded by the spirits, and the moment I have written I see the words fly about the room in all directions. It is then published, and the spirits can read. My MSS. of no further use. I have been tempted to burn my MSS., but my wife won't let me." Crabb Robinson was a trusty reporter; but if Blake always spoke for his understanding is another matter. Rumour hints that after Mrs. Blake's death a number of MSS. passed into Tatham's possession, who, in a fury of Irvingite zeal, burnt them at the instruction of his elders. Sir Richard Garnett states that he saw Tatham, who sought to convey that the possessions that passed to him were not destroyed, but sold. That is likely enough. If the illuminated copy of *Jerusalem* was not burnt, but discreetly sold, it is probable that nothing was burnt, whatever the elders might have been told. The collection of sketches were also preserved and sold. There are hints, rumours, and records of lost books, such as *Outhoon*, *The Book of Enoch* and *The Book of Moonlight*. These may yet appear; but only the last of these is likely to have been written during these years.

with humour; but he had received its gifts thankfully, and paid for them in round coin, without question. Linnell at once entered that life. He did it gravely; with a stiff, upright manner; puzzledly, with no humour at all in his sudden interest; but he did it promptly, and he did it with a rare tenderness all the sweeter because of the gravity of his manner. At any time that gift would have been beyond price; for few give it, and few receive it, and the two do not punctually meet. At the moment it was just what was needed to draw a sensitive, disappointed recluse into what was to prove to be the period of his most perfect achievement.

The promptitude, and the grave manner, are evident in John Linnell's own account of their first meeting. George Cumberland's son, who lived in London, took him to see Blake. In 1818, Linnell writes, "I first became acquainted with William Blake, to whom I paid a visit in company with the younger Mr. Cumberland. Blake lived then in South Molton Street, Oxford Street, second floor. We soon became intimate, and I employed him to help me with an engraving of my portrait of Mr. Upton, a Baptist preacher, which he was glad enough to do, having scarcely enough employment to live by at the prices he could obtain. . . . I soon encountered Blake's peculiarities, and, somewhat taken aback by the boldness of some of his assertions, I never saw anything like madness, for I never opposed him spitefully, as many did, but being really anxious to fathom, if possible, the amount of truth which might be in his most startling assertions, generally met with a sufficiently rational explanation in the most really friendly and conciliatory tone."

These words throw a wealth of light over both men. The spiritual world has its own laws. Miracles cannot be performed before the merely incredulous; a plain fact not without ample testimony from history, while Blake's spiritual experience became misshapen when told to the spiteful and the gossip-monger. Linnell was a direct and friendly man. Where others heard what bewildered and amused them, Linnell, for precisely the same occurrences, received a direct and friendly explanation, to prove that men receive from experience the truth and beauty they bring to it.

Both men, therefore, received richly from the friendship, each finding in the other what he himself needed. That is apparent from the quickness with which their friendship ripened. They went together to see exhibitions of pictures; and (what must have been an infrequent experience, at the least, in Blake's life) they went twice together in 1820 to Drury Lane Theatre. Linnell was, when they first met, a young man of twenty-six,

beginning his first work as a miniature-painter. Blake was then sixty-one. Their need of one another thus began in the complement of their ages and experience. It was pursued into practical matters. In later years Linnell took earnestly to the graver, and made a series of engravings from Michael Angelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, such work as Blake would have commended to him. At the present moment he was beginning the use of the graver; and Blake helped him. A few years later, when he had failed to get a purchaser for them in Chantrey, Linnell bought the *Paradise Regained* series, and also three designs that may have been copies of, but appear to be preparatory studies for, the second *Paradise Lost* series. All these had lain on Blake's hands for many years without a buyer.[1] These are all signs of helpful exchange and association.

Blake made other friends at this time. Through Flaxman he met Richter and Holmes, both painters in water-colour. Through the same friend he met Cary, the translator of Dante. None of these came nearer than the outskirts of his life. Fuseli saluted him respectfully and honourably from afar. Flaxman and Butts remained as they had ever been, though it appears that Butts now began to pass to a distance. Young Linnell alone, with utmost gravity and seriousness, entered as nearly into the citadel of that life, and was as openly received, as any man in all Blake's days.

3

Thus an astonishing thing occurred. Blake went to school again: went obediently and willingly. Oddly enough, to his own original masters he went. None had entered his life before in this manner; and he had therefore learned hard ways for himself, pupil only to his own exploration and adventure in Art. What he had discovered, he had announced in his writings with all the emphasis of the discoverer, and with the added emphasis of one who suspects that if he does not speak loud enough another side to the story might be heard. The force of his

[1] In Gilchrist's *List* these are allotted, respectively, to the years 1825 and 1822. These are apparently the dates when Linnell made his purchases. The drawings themselves are undated. They were almost certainly done in or about 1808, when Blake was making all his other designs for Milton's poems. Circumstance and style agree with the earlier date. I have only seen one of the three separate designs for *Paradise Lost: Michael Foretelling the Crucifixion*, in Mr. T. H. Riches' possession. It is obviously an unfinished study for *The Prophecy of the Crucifixion* of the second *Paradise Lost* series. The design and drawing are the same, except that the figure of Michael is not finished as it is in the design for the series. There are other signs of lack of finish, all indicating that it was done before the series dated 1808.

enunciation, as a careful ear may hear, and as his own experiments avow, was sometimes necessary to quell quiet voices that spoke in his own mind. Only one who entered this inmost citadel could help Blake to unfold the complexities and contradictions he had sought to simplify by forcefulness. This was Linnell's supreme service to Blake and to us.

Apparently this service was given while Linnell, as he records, employed Blake to help him with his engraving. Easy to know the kind of help Blake had to give. Had he not learned the strong, severe manner of engraving of his master, the first James Basire? Had he not announced that the " distinct, sharp and wirey bounding line " was the " great and golden rule of Art." His own preceptors were Dürer, Marcantonio and the early Italians, whose prints he had eagerly bought as a boy of ten, fifty years before. These were the models he upheld for instruction. Linnell's reply has just the quality of grave, attentive enquiry that all his relations with Blake reveal. Was it so sure that these great preceptors practised the " wirey bounding line " to the neglect of all other qualities, or that they had much in common with James Basire? Consider Marcantonio's *Bathers*, for example, or his *Death of Lucretia*. Surely the beauty of these came from a subtlety of shading and a delicate flexile strength of workmanship not wholly to be comprised by any doctrine of a wiry bounding line, clean though the cutting might be. Particularly he drew Blake's attention to Marcantonio's disciple Giulio Bonosone, on whom their mutual friend, George Cumberland, had so long ago as 1793 published a book, with a catalogue of his engravings.[1] He was a softer artist; yet surely the rich texture and subtlety of his *Portrait of Michael Angelo* was not to be comprised by any doctrine of the wiry bounding line, and had little to do with the hard severity of Basire. When the school of Blake's great preceptors reached its maturity, it discarded cross-hatching for its shading, and displayed a delicacy, variety and subtlety in the handling of the graver that were surely worth Blake's renewed study.

Then Blake, when over sixty years of age, immediately became the pupil again. The doctrines he had announced were not permitted to raise their foreheads between him and new lessons to be learned. The harper, who sang to his harp, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, had for his theme this: that " The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and

[1] *Some Anecdotes of the Life of Julio Bonosone;* with a Catalogue of his Engravings. By George Cumberland. London, 1793.—The first letter written by Blake that has survived is addressed to George Cumberland, giving him instructions as to the transference of a drawing to a plate for engraving. It is dated 6th December, 1795.

breeds reptiles of the mind"; and among the Proverbs of Hell was this other: that "The most sublime act is to set another before you." Blake put his precepts to practice, and set the young man John Linnell before him. He lamented that he had learned in Basire's school only to make sharp incisions by line and cross-hatching when all this other varied subtle play of the graver had been possible. He went diligently again to school, bringing with him the habits of a life of untiring industry; and the results of his study are to be found in the amazing beauty and light and depth and subtlety of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, the engraving of which he was soon to begin.

4

It is not surprising, then, to find that Blake, after the coming of John Linnell, should enter a new space of creative power after his years of darkness and obscurity. It is curious to note how quickly the change came. It is interesting, too, to note the mark of that change. Linnell met Blake for the first time in June, 1818; and before long Blake is found printing copies of *Jerusalem*.

He had begun making his plates for this as early as 1804, when the task of revision seems to have caused delay. When the plates were finished it is impossible to say. Crabb Robinson states that Blake showed Southey a copy of the book on July 11, 1811. As Blake considered the illuminations and illustrations to be essential parts of his Prophetic Books, it is unlikely that Blake would have showed Southey an unprinted book. This may therefore have been a rough copy printed for Blake's own use, lost with a good many other of Blake's papers and manuscripts. After he had left Hercules Buildings he had not printed further copies of his Prophetic Books, except for buyers. "Having none remaining of all that I had printed," he wrote in 1827, "I cannot Print more, except at a great loss. For at the time I printed those things I had a whole house to range in. Now I am shut in a corner, therefore I am forced to ask a price for them that I can scarce expect to get from a stranger."

In the same letter to George Cumberland he spoke of the time and labour spent in printing these books from prepared plates: "I am now printing a set of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* for a friend at 10 guineas, which I cannot do under six months consistent with my other work." These *Songs* were written on small plates, less than a third the size of the plates of *Jerusalem*, and there were only half as many of them. Easy to understand why the plates of *Jerusalem* should have remained unprinted

during the years of want and darkness. Now, perhaps at Linnell's suggestion, he began to print copies of *Jerusalem*.

The earliest paper used in the only copies that have survived bears the watermark of 1818; but these copies also contain paper with watermarks of 1819 and 1820. Paper with the watermark of a year was not necessarily bought in that year; but the suggestion is that soon after he met Linnell, Blake began printing copies of *Jerusalem*, and that the labour of printing kept him occupied for two or three years. These copies seem to have been done merely as samples. They were not printed in colour, or afterwards coloured, as were all his other Prophetic Books. They were printed in Indian ink. Only on occasional pages were washes of colour added, as though to suggest the appearance of a page when finished in colour as Blake desired it to be. Only one copy of *Jerusalem* was eventually printed and finished in colour, and it is a wonder of beauty. This was not begun until after 1820; and Blake seems to have kept it at hand to enrich during the last years of his life. He refers to it in the letter to George Cumberland. "One I have finished. It contains 100 plates, but it is not likely that I shall get a customer for it." He spoke truly. It passed on his death into Tatham's hands. But his words mark the other copies as unfinished, implying that he printed them, not as the book that lived in his imagination, but as samples for show, probably at Linnell's suggestion.

5

Whether or not this suggestion came from Linnell, the immediate influence of his entry into Blake's life is that Blake returned to earlier work in new hope for the future. This is not the only sign of a glance backward over years that had gone because of new hope for years to come. In 1793 he had made a small book of engravings entitled *For Children : The Gates of Paradise*. He now took these, revised the plates, added others, and made a new book entitled *For the Sexes : The Gates of Paradise*. The additions are the very voice of the author of *Jerusalem*. Among these additions was a *Prologue* beginning :

> Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice,
> Such are the Gates of Paradise;

and the famous, unforgettable *Epilogue :—*

> Truly, My Satan, thou art but a Dunce,
> And dost not know the Garment from the Man.
> Every Harlot was a Virgin once,
> Nor canst thou ever change Kate into Nan.

Tho' thou art Worship'd by the Names Divine
Of Jesus and Jehovah, thou art still
The Son of Man in weary Night's decline,
The lost Traveller's Dream under the Hill.

At the same time in his notebook he wrote the most astonishing of all his poems, *The Everlasting Gospel*. Like most of the poems in his notebook, this is undated; but the voice is that of the *Prologue* and the *Epilogue* of *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, the voice of one who had written *Jerusalem*.

Then the inspiration that once again brightened his life caused him to renew the greatest of his powers. Among the few technical experiments he had never yet attempted was the difficult, decisive art of the wood-cut. To this he now turned. He made a series of nineteen wood-cuts for Thornton's school edition of the *Pastorals of Virgil*. When the publishers of the book saw these unusual blocks they hastily ordered the designs to be recut; but when once reassured by eminent opinion Dr. Thornton interposed. Sixteen were saved, were printed as executed by Blake, and remain among his most beautiful and original work.

He also began now, about 1820, the large tempera-painting on *The Last Judgment* (for which a first sketch exists) planned eleven years before. This of itself is a sign of renewal of life. Whether the picture was finished or not is not known, for, like so much else of Blake's work, it has been lost.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MADNESS OF BLAKE

I

Few events in Blake's life have attracted more curious interest than certain drawings he made at this time. For these John Linnell is also in some measure responsible. Only one of them, *The Ghost of a Flea*, may be said to have any part in Blake's work. The rest have an interest that, if curious, is casual. Worth, in work and character (in work because of character), is not a quality to be measured, but to be weighed. If, with one exception, all these drawings were to be lost, the weight of Blake's work would be neither less nor more. Yet it does happen that they raise questions that lie at the root of all his work. That question would still rise clearly enough without them. It asks to be answered, not merely by his own definite declarations, in letters and other writings, but in most of his greatest pictures, the sight of which, or faces or gestures or aspects of which, seem to reach toward and stir depths of elemental being in nearly all who attentively contemplate them, depths of which most are afraid, which they seek hastily to cover up and forget, but of which Blake in such pictures is an unfailing and unforgettable mentor.

It is unnecessary to consider if Blake was mad. Madmen do not attract such uncommonly sane friends as Blake did; and the united judgment of those who knew him was that Blake himself was an uncommonly sane and wise man. Yet it is just to consider why Blake has been called mad; and it is idle to dismiss that consideration as without meaning. Charles Lamb, by his own confession, did not know Blake. He only met him once, when he looked at sixteen pictures in an empty exhibition; but fifteen years afterwards he remembered him, when much else that passed in the meantime had been considerately and justly forgotten, and he remembered him to wonder if he were in a madhouse. That of itself is sufficient to prove that the enquiry is not idle, however untrue and unjust the question itself may be. That question has been too often asked since, by those whom Time did not permit to meet the man, but who only know him through his work, for it to be dismissed without enquiry—for it is a significant fact that those who knew Blake himself, who spoke with him and lived near his savour, found him to be filled full of the sanity of life, whereas it is those who see him only in the strange, unearthly light of much of his work who seek to evade him (and to evade the depths of themselves which he stirs) by the epithet of madness. Blake himself, at least, did not

dismiss the question. He knew of the charge; and looked at it open-eyed, with grim humour, and almost with glory.

It is generally assumed that Blake has been dismissed as mad because of the oddness of his behaviour, or because of the unnatural deliberation of his life, or because of the strangeness and strength of his opinions, or because of the incoherence of some of his poems, or because of the mingling of all these things. That is not the case. It will generally be found that the charge is made by those who have looked on some of his most arresting pictures, and have been startled and disturbed, not so much by Blake, as by that which he has stirred and awakened in themselves. Deep has called to deep; and disquietude, if not terror, has succeeded. That is why the drawings which Blake made at this time have an immediate if casual value. They raise a question that lies at the centre of Blake's work as an artist. They do not themselves carry the question. They merely raise it in a curious form. That is the only interest they possess, for of themselves they call to no deeps and stir no disquietude. Indeed, they have only succeeded in allowing the larger question to be evaded.

2

Among Linnell's friends was John Varley, one of the foundation members of the Water-Colour Society, who painted rapid, solemn pictures for his needs, and took pupils. In his house Linnell had lived and learned a year. Varley was also a practising astrologer; and some of the predictions he had made, read from the horologes he cast, had been remarkably confirmed. Natural that such a man should wish to meet a man like Blake, who said that the people and scenes he drew in his pictures had been seen by him in vision in the spiritual world; seen, not by the eyes through which he looked out on the visible world, but by the spiritual sense of imagination illumining the mind. Linnell, therefore, brought Blake round to Varley's house; and so wrought a friendship that remained for the rest of Blake's life.

Now Blake in his spiritual being knew of other dimensions that he could express even in his Prophetic Books, where they ensnared him into long passages, in which by the repetition of forceful words and massive symbols he struggles vainly to utter his meanings. Much less could he unfold these things in conversation with the curious. Blake believed that long deep meditation on a person who has passed from the world might lead to communion with that person. Pressed in conversation he would not have

hesitated to say, did not hesitate to say, not that such communion could be established, with love and purity on either side, but that he could at will bring up before him the spirits of such persons. Varley then asked him if he could with pencil and brush draw such persons; and Blake without hesitation proceeded to do as he was desired. Varley asked for historical personages; and Blake, looking intently where poor Varley saw nothing but insubstantial air, began rapidly to draw what he had summoned before him, remarking as he did so, " There, it is gone," or " He has moved," or " There's another there now," till Varley fell asleep in his chair in very despair and exhaustion, while Blake, once started, continued drawing hour after hour, till four o'clock in the morning.

Varley seems greatly to have prized the drawings that were made in this fashion. " Varley believed in the reality of Blake's visions more than even Blake himself," as John Linnell quietly remarked. The plain truth is that if they were now to be found, without knowledge of the man who made them, or of the circumstances of their making, with one exception none of them would be found to be very remarkable. They comprise the heads of kings of England, of William Wallace, and of others, that stir no depths, and assuredly have little to do with the imagination that instructed the hand to make *The Elohim Creating Adam*. The only one of these Visionary Portraits, as they have been called, that holds attention for more than a moment is the imbecile head of *The Man Who Built the Pyramids;* but then Blake believed that anyone who went to such great trouble to erect so large a mere mathematical design must have been an imbecile.

When Blake drew these Visionary Portraits he was not in the deep inward contemplation of the creative mood. His spirit was not brooding over the depths, having travelled within to pass beyond. He was under the challenge of the curious, directed to the surface of a strong visualising mind. It is obvious that he lived always amid pictures and figures. The frigid intellectual abstractions of eighteenth-century verse-makers, for example, such as Young and Blair, and even Gray, at once became huge personifications before Blake's sight as he read their mild lines; and it was nothing difficult for him to draw on paper the figures his rapid visualisation created. One may imagine the astonishment and alarm of good Thomas Gray if some of Blake's illustrations to his poems had been put into his hands. He would doubtless have dropped the book in his amazement. Never would he have thought that his mild tropes could have evoked so terrific a response. Names and figures, as well as images and abstrac-

tions, became instantly visualised before Blake's eyes ; and there is nothing about these drawings of kings, patriots, assassins and pyramid-builders to signify that they were not visualisations evoked by Varley's challenges of curiosity.

3

One of them, however, is entirely different. Five separate facts are worth noting in this case : first, that it seems to have been the only instance where a figure had already come of its own will, without Varley's prediction or request ; second, that it is the only case at which later generations have looked with horror as though they saw there some terrible authenticity, even though they quickly brushed that thought away ; third, that it is the only case for which Blake was careful to make separate drawings of the jaws and parts of the face ; fourth, that it was the only case for which Blake afterwards made a subsequent picture, which he did in tempera, entitling it *The Ghost of a Flea* ;[1] and fifth, that it is the only instance in which Blake had seen the same figure at a time of creative contemplation.

The entire figure in this case is a terrible one, that no humorous dismissal can alter. Its devilish face, its bestial obscene figure and its prowling, preying motion are all parts of a complete whole, are stamped with an authentic horror. But this was not the first time Blake had seen (if seen be indeed the word) this figure. Fourteen years before, when, during a period of acknowledged spiritual illumination, he was drawing his *Plagues of Egypt* series, and scenes from the history of the children of Israel, he had drawn this very head, form and motion in *Pestilence* and *David and Goliath*.[2] Not only is the figure the same in all three drawings ; the theme is the same. *The Ghost of a Flea* is a title that touches on the humorous, though it was not humorous to Blake ; but its theme of blood-lust is the same as that of Pestilence rioting in the slaughter of the first-born and of Goliath coming forth daily for his victim. There is no thought of correspondence in Blake's mind. He was not slow to record his ideas in his notebooks, and there is no suggestion of the kind to be discovered. There is no reason to suppose that he himself was even aware of the obvious identity of these three figures. All the more significant, therefore, are they ; and all the stranger the stamp of authenticity. This devilish figure of blood-lust appears, as it were, in Blake's work from some place outside his consciousness—outside even his cognisance—looking into the world like some creature of prey looking in from outer darkness.

[1] Plate 68. [2] Plates 66 and 67.

This is almost the only instance in Blake's work of what, for lack of other adequate phrase, may be called the presentment of absolute evil. For that reason it is the more arresting, because mankind seems quicker to know absolute evil than absolute beauty, being more readily stirred to fear than to ecstasy. In *Nebuchadnezzar* the aspect of the same horror is present, but with a subtle and signifying difference ; for in the drawing Nebuchadnezzar appears, not as an embodiment of that evil, but as a soul that has fallen into its dominion for a term. This, it is true, Blake meant. It was what he intended to portray. But what no artist could have intended, or, having intended, by the mere intention, with whatever skill of brush or millboard, have executed, without some other strange incommensurable power, is the overpowering sense that the scene we are looking into is something more than a deft invention of his own. It is for this reason that the picture, once seen, is unforgettable, dwelling and growing in the imagination with its own life, till in memory it becomes less a picture than a portent.

4

These are, however, his only visions of evil. Their garments as messengers of light are torn from them. In the greater number of his pictures not a trace of this monstrous obscene evil is to be found. It makes no appearance in the drawings he made from time to time of Satan. Blake, like Milton before him, found virtue in that pride and energy and indomitable will. *Satan Calling up his Legions in Hell* is a nobler, finer figure than the somewhat pretty *Satan in his Former Glory*.[1] The sombre pride of *Satan Exulting over Eve*[2] is the likeness of one well worth winning for less savage and senseless a recreation. These are spiritual qualities that have their part in the complete man. They are at least not material death, much less are they horror and ruin.

Yet there is another quality in Blake's pictures. It is also a quality of terror, therefore also a quality of something seen and known. It is an error in thinking to suppose that terror or fear is created when men are confronted with what they neither know nor have seen before. What men have never known nor seen before arouses only their curiosity, if indeed they succeed in noticing it at all. Terror and fear are parts of experience and knowledge, somewhere, somehow gathered. The emotion of terror, whatever its quality, is a sign of previous knowledge. To study the effect of some of Blake's noblest and grandest designs on certain kinds of mind is to witness a very curious, yet very ancient, opposition.

[1] Plates 8 and 9. [2] Plate 12.

In many of his pictures, such as, for example, *The Creation of Eve* and *Raphael with Adam and Eve*,[1] the beauty and loveliness stir no depths in the contemplation save the depths of peace, though about these too there plays a light that is certainly not the light of this world. In others the conflict of light and darkness is treated indeed, but only in such form as to reach the mind, or to enlighten the imagination without troubling the deeps. But there are others (and it happens that these are they on which Blake's signature of vision is most securely placed) that repel certain minds violently, and bring disquietude to others, even where their nobility and grandeur, their majesty and beauty, are most freely admitted. It is as though highths and ranges such as these are not allowable to man, for they threaten the little securities of his life. Lineaments so urgent, beauty so transfiguring, motions so large and so shattering, even when rendered by all the limitations of an artist's craft, are not comfortably to be borne. Within the little securities of Man's life on earth sanity is to be found. Anyone who goes outside them must be mad. To acknowledge such a man as a genius, or his work as majestical and beautiful, far from altering the madness, the more confirms it. The regions where he dwelt are the regions from which madness comes, for thence come the qualities (qualities therefore of terror) that seek to break the moulds of comfort, security and society where sanity abides. No doubt they are real. If they were not real, there would be nothing in them to fear. But they are forbidden, they are not allowable. Are there not (the unexpressed question runs) scenes of pleasant beauty on this earth to be painted, without venturing into these depths within (where lie the ranges beyond) for the painting of scenes and beings so shattering and therefore so disquieting?

Blake's answer to this, of course, was that only a fragment of Man's life is lived, as part of his necessary experience, in the phantasm of Time and Space. His true life is lived in Eternity, enfolding his little days. "I see," he said,

> I see the Past, Present and Future existing all at once
> Before me. O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings.

Yet it is to this that the ascription of madness has been due—not that he was a phantastical lunatic, occupied with unrealities, but that he was too real, even too terrible, and that his finest pictures only bring discomfort and disquietude into life. At an exhibition of Blake's pictures twelve years ago, for example, it was curious to stand awhile and to note the comments made before such pictures as *The Elohim Creating Adam* and *The Ancient*

[1] Plates 19 and 17.

of Days, that rank highest in Blake's work. Most of these comments ran in the same strain. An eminent politician of his hour, for instance, stood long before the latter of these; then said that it was certainly very fine, even a magnificent thing, but that he would not care to live with it. He was glad it did not hang in his house, for if it did he would live in constant fear of it. Before *The Elohim Creating Adam* he called on his Creator to help him (which was an odd thing to do, for there was his Creator before him !), and passed away with a comical look of extreme discomfort.

It seemed as if, somewhere in his being, Blake looked on beings—on presences, in all the meanings of that word—that these others could not but acknowledge, but desired only to forget. They, therefore, wished to keep this seer of visions far from them; and with singular unanimity found refuge in the ascription of madness.[1] But the madness of which they were in fear was their own. Blake would not long have hesitated to find a quotation for their need; and it would have been in some such words as " Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Certainly he himself lived for testimony to such words.

5

Here rises another aspect of the same quality in his designs. It is raised instantly by his " Visionary Portrait " of *The Ghost of a Flea*. It, too, caused him to be charged with madness. He saw in vision those whom he portrayed in his designs. So he claimed; and it is of no avail to escape into words such as ' subliminal ' in order to diminish or step aside from that claim. He knew what he claimed; and there are passages in his Prophetic Books to suggest that he had not much to learn from modern classifications. Others, no doubt, have claimed the same; and it has been forgotten with their dust. He himself made the claim (or Varley believed that he did) for his " Visionary Portraits "; and that claim saves for them only the curiosity that caused them to be drawn. To make such a claim is quickly done. To justify it in the experience of others is a sterner task.

Blake's pictures live, of course, not merely by virtue of any such claim, but because he, their maker, is among the great imaginative artists of the world, with qualities of execution, with powers of communication, that, with all his naked defects, are rare. He himself would, reading such words,

[1] It is curious how often in the production of this book I have heard the puzzled statement that the man who painted such things must have been mad; and from those, too, who had never heard of Blake before, except vaguely as a poet of sorts.

instantly ask what they mean: what is imagination? what is communicated? what is executed? Such questions, truly considered, pierce to the centre of his claim. Yet let them pass; for there is a more immediate test. It will be acknowledged, for it is a matter of experience, that while it is admitted that Blake's pictures must be brought to the ordinary standards of Art, there is a quality in them that always evades that test. When all is said, they are found not to live among the rest of pictures. They escape from that great company, and take a separate place in a visionary world of their own. It is a plain fact in experience that, when all their great qualities of imagination and execution are told, Blake's pictures are regarded (by friend and foe) just as much as a secret visionary scripture as a series of great examples of pictorial art.

Why is this? Why is it that some who look into his pictures, see faces in them suddenly look back in response, as though they, too, as well as Blake, knew them somewhere not in this world? Such persons wish to possess such pictures, undisturbed by doubtful drawing or questionable anatomy. If they cannot possess them, they do not easily forget them. Why is it that others, who admit the power of conception and frequent technical skill of some of Blake's greatest pictures (pictures most indisputably stamped with his signature of vision), turn from them, sometimes with active dislike, sometimes in puzzled discomfort, as though they, too, had seen something in them that was from beyond the picture? Such persons would not have Blake's pictures near them, whatever their artistic merit or acknowledged worth. These questions are worth considering, for both these sets of persons seem to attest the validity of Blake's claim, and the authenticity of at least some of the presences whom his pencil and brush portrayed with sufficient fidelity for recognition. There should be some cause for these strange effects; and to charge Blake with madness, or to describe him as a psychopath, is to leave the question just as it was before.

Certainly the supernal beings of Blake's pictures, like the pictures in which they are portrayed, live in a unique, coherent, luminous world of their own. To look at reproductions of his pictures one after another, gathered together in a number, is to do something much more than to look at pictures. It is to live an experience—a disturbing experience. A roomful of Blake's most distinctive pictures becomes at once, not merely a gallery hung with pictures, but a room full of Blake's supernal beings. To ask, then, if Blake was mad, or a psychopath, helps nothing. It might prove of some moment to enquire if Blake is sane. Fortunately for this

there is a sign. If one could conceive a long corridor hung to infinity on the one hand with Blake's pictures, and on the other (despite his emptiness) with, say, Aubrey Beardsley's, it is not difficult to foretell that the beings in each would be constrained to leave their frames for a war of light and darkness. And none, whether he love Blake or hate him, revere or despise him, will be in any doubt which the warriors of light would be in such an astral engagement.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FULLNESS OF ACHIEVEMENT (1821-1827)

I

Blake had now, in 1821, been seventeen years in South Molton Street, ever since his return from Felpham. He had known a period of great illumination there; and there passed through days of greatest darkness. He would no doubt have continued to live there to the end of his days, but that his landlord sold his business and left the country. He moved, therefore, to Fountain Court, off the Strand, to a house kept by his wife's brother-in-law. Here he spent the remaining years of his life. He occupied two rooms on the first floor, one of which he seems to have used both as a bedroom and a working-room. Tatham states that he "fixed upon these lodgings as being more congenial to his habits, as he was very much accustomed to get out of his bed in the night to write for hours, and return to bed for the rest of the night after having committed to paper pages and pages of his mysterious phantasies." But the arrangement was decreed as much by necessity as by desire; for Blake had arrived at a time of his greatest want.

However near John Linnell had come to Blake, to help him at a time when patient faith was required, he had not come near enough to learn how Blake lived. Such intimacy of knowledge is not often shared, especially between two men at so great a distance of years. Besides, Blake inevitably grew more stubborn and proud in temper the deeper he went in need. Yet it was Linnell and none other who first learned of a tragedy that even at this distance of time strikes with a sense of shock and loving pity.

Linnell has told the story himself. At Fountain Court (he wrote) Blake "began to feel the want of employment, and before I knew his distress he had sold all his collection of old prints to Messrs Colnaghi and Co." What this meant to Blake is, to be sure, unutterable. Here were prints that had been bought by the boy of ten, lately examined again for the learning of new lessons. Here were, in fact, the only possessions of his life; the expression of himself. The sale of them can only mean that he had sought employment in every quarter, and had failed, and had need of bread.

Learning of this, Linnell at once approached Sir Thomas Lawrence and other members of the Royal Academy. The result was that in 1822 the Council of the Academy "voted him a donation of £25, which was sent to him by my hands, and for which he expressed great thankfulness."

This discovery led, however, to another project. Linnell himself was at this time an artist in the early days of his career. He was in no way to becoming a patron of Art; but he entered into partnership with Blake in a project that was, in simple and literal truth, to set the crown on Blake's work, and to ensure himself in thankful memory whatever his own life might bring him.

About 1820, it seems, Blake had made a series of twenty-two water-colour drawings for the *Book of Job*. These had been bought by Butts. It was the last purchase Butts made, and the two men drifted apart in the years that followed, after twenty years of friendship. Apparently Blake borrowed these from Butts in 1821 to show to Linnell; and Linnell commissioned him to make another set. Two years later Linnell apparently suggested that they should be engraved. An agreement was drawn up between the two men, dated 25 March, 1823, by which Blake was to receive £100 for twenty plates and the copyright. This sum was to be paid " part before, and the remainder when the plates are finished "; that is to say, as Blake needed the money, and as Linnell earned it to give. Blake was also to receive another £100 out of the profits on the sale of the engravings, " as the receipts will admit of it." As it happened, there were no profits; but Linnell paid Blake a further £50, in small sums from time to time, just as though there had been profits. It was also carefully provided by Linnell that he was " to find copper plates."

Writing about this transaction Linnell said afterwards, " as I had also the expectation, and have still of remuneration (the plates being my property), I have no claim to any notice upon that account . . . we were both disappointed in our expectations as to the extent of the sale." These words are characteristic of Linnell; but they cannot mask what occurred. There was an element of sound business in the transaction, and that was also characteristic of Linnell; but the formal agreement, duly drawn up and signed, was a quite unnecessary document between these two men. It was manifestly only employed as a cover for Blake's pride, to enable Linnell to help him in his need, by giving him, on foot of the agreement (and, later, on foot of another similar agreement, when this had served its turn) weekly sums of £2 and £3 out of his own earnings to enable Blake to live without anxiety in a little comfort. Linnell says this, indeed. It " answered," he wrote, in a letter that incidentally reveals the slender measure of his means, " the purpose of furnishing him with the means of comfortable subsistence to his death." Over the years a savour of infinite worth comes from the care and loving thought of this act.

2

Thus Blake began his greatest work, the last that he finished. His first act had been to produce a fresh set of water-colour drawings, in which (as he had done with the second set of the *Paradise Lost* series) he revised the original series to some extent, strengthened his invention and tempered his execution. Then he appears to have made a set of pencil drawings for the plates. These sketches become less detailed and complete as the series continues, the last of them being little more than hasty outlines, as though he was in haste to be finished with preliminaries and to begin work upon the copper. In this way, he made four trial excursions before he made the actual engravings. In fact, he made five ; for he pulled proofs of the designs themselves before he added the borders, with the consequence that on the finished plates he made other revisions and slight changes. All these add their part to a perfect consummation.

These engravings, entitled *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, and described as " Invented and Engraved by William Blake," were published in 1825. Only casually and by occasion, however, are they illustrations of the *Book of Job*. They form a separate poem telling Blake's philosophy in its completest and most lucid expression. Here Blake, with characteristic courage, sets forth to answer the problem of evil that the author of the original poem had himself engaged, but had in the end avoided. In the original poem the end of Job is trite and inconclusive. Is this all, for climax and conclusion of such grievous woe, that Job should finish as he began, with as many children, and as many flocks and herds ? Certainly that was not a sufficient answer for Blake. So material, so comfortable an end of the pother was to Blake a very anti-climax. It was no conclusion at all. It was, in fact, a denial of the argument of the poem itself, a reversal of its vision of life, the ends of which were spiritual gain. The discipline of tribulation (and all experience is tribulation) was sent to bring the spirit of man from its simple first innocence to wisdom and to beauty in the possession of a complete, perfected individuality. This he set forth to show. Since the original author had not done it, he would do it. The first of his " inventions " reveals Job, before a setting sun, reading to his family from great books the doctrines taught by others. The musical instruments of personal experience hang unused on the tree of his life. The last displays the entire family, before a rising sun, the instruments now in their hands, singing their own individual songs—in a design he had already used in the Life of Christ series. Between the first and the last each " invention " unfolds

the manner of the discipline by which so great a conclusion was reached from so unlikely a beginning. Rightly to follow that unfolding, his own words, written years before in the *Vision of the Last Judgment*, must be remembered: "I intreat that the Spectator will attend to the Hands and Feet, to the lineaments of the Countenances; they are all descriptive of Character, and not a line is drawn without intention, and that most discriminate and particular." Of nothing in Blake's work are these words more true than of his separate poem on the problem of evil, done by way of "inventions" for the *Book of Job*. Each part of each design carries its meaning. Nothing is obtruded on the picture, yet the thought is closely woven and complete.[1]

All the burning energy of thought, that in the Prophetic Books entangled him so often in strange thickets, is here found controlled and calm. The thinker and seer of visions finds his way without difficulty, without entanglements in which to struggle with many words. He has also brought his craft to the same simplicity and flexibility. He still is the praiser of the bounding line. In his last letter to George Cumberland, within four months of his death, he wrote: "A line is a line in its minutest subdivisions, straight or crooked. It is itself, not intermeasurable by anything else. Such is *Job*. . . . God keep you and me from the divinity of yes, and no too—the yea, nay, creeping Jesus—from supposing up and down to be the same thing, as all experimentalists must suppose." But the line has now become a different thing. It has "minutest subdivisions" that it had not before. It contains light and shade, depth and distance, binding these qualities together in a pattern each part of which lightly carries the symbol of his meaning. The new varied play of the graver yields subtle shadings and delicate moulding to prove how richly he had profited from his recent study. He is still austere, in conception and execution, as suits his occasion; but his austerity is gently clothed. Both art and craft have been refined, and in the end of experience married together, to make a poem as wise in its beauty as beautiful in its wisdom.

3

Blake could hardly go higher than this; but he could go further. The necessity of livelihood compelled him to go further, though it did not permit him to complete his new task. Once again it was Linnell who sug-

[1] In Blake's *Vision of the Book of Job* Mr. Joseph Wicksteed for the first time undertook this exposition. It would be difficult to speak too well of this book.

gested the project. In the *Job* illustrations he had been engaged on a theme that had interested him from the beginning of his work. As early as 1792 he had made his first design on that theme, in *The Complaint of Job*. Not long after that he made two others, *God Answering Job out of the Whirlwind* and *Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils*.[1] He had therefore been working on a subject already formed and complete in his mind. Not so with the next task Linnell proposed to him. This was to make, on the same terms as before (or if not on the same terms, certainly with the same object of sharing his earnings with Blake) a series of designs for Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

This, accordingly, Blake prepared to do. He did so in characteristic fashion. At the age of sixty-seven he began, with the help of his friend Cary's translation of Dante before him, to learn Italian, that he might understand in his original speech the poet whose poem he had resolved to illustrate. While he took his meals he studied Italian with passionate energy. But his end was upon him, and he did not live to complete his task. He continued at his work till the end, but left it unfinished. He made a hundred folio drawings, some of them carried almost to completion, many of them but roughly sketched. The most beautiful of them is *Paolo and Francesca in the Whirlwind of Lovers*.[2] In addition to the folio drawings, he also began seven engravings; but these were also unfinished, the *Paolo and Francesca* being the only one that was carried to an advanced state.[3]

He was not happy while at work upon Dante, however. Florentine painters and engravers were his first joy; but it is plain that he found the Florentine poet not so joyous at the end. His comments on some of his

[1] Plates 60, 61, and 62. The differences between these and the later "inventions" are worth study. Each of these subjects was repeated in his "inventions." In the first the treatment was entirely altered. In the second the design is the same, except that Satan's wings are shorn. In the third the general design is the same, but the treatment is different. The whirlwind of angels is taken to the border, and with it goes the infinity of distance above God's head that it encloses. In this case the painting is nobler and more beautiful than the engraving. It has not to my knowledge been reproduced in colour before; and it exists in its colour. Contrast, for example, the limited horizon of blue over Job's head with the unlimited horizon of blue over God's head.

[2] Plate 90.

[3] These drawings are now widely scattered; but the Directors of "The National Art-Collections Fund" have done deep service in having reproductions made of them all, for publication in folio, before they went to the ends of the earth. In that collection their unity is preserved. The folio is entitled "*Illustrations to the Divine Comedy of Dante*, by William Blake."

first rough sketches may yet be read. They are evidences of his warfare with Dante. One of them is violent and coarse. In another he writes: "It seems as if Dante's supreme Good was something superior to the Father of Jesus, for if he gives his rain to the Evil and the Good, and his Sun to the Just and the Unjust He could never have builded Dante's Hell nor the Hell of the Bible neither, in the way our Parsons explain it. It must have been originally Formed by the Devil Himself. So I understand it to have been." The difference between the two men was wide; but Blake did not live long enough to be able to carry his work to such a state as to define that difference, as he had done with *Job*.

4

While he was at work on these last tasks Blake met new friends, all of whom, in one way or another, came to him through John Linnell. He gathered about him, in fact, for the first time in his life, a cluster of affectionate disciples. The chief of these was, of course, Linnell himself. Among the others were Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert and George Richmond. From June, 1922, Linnell lived at Hampstead. There Blake was in the habit of going by coach on Sundays, though he says in his letters that he found that the air of "all places north of London laid me up the day after." Here the company gathered. It also met frequently in Blake's rooms at Fountain Court, which became known by the company as "The House of the Interpreter."

Records left of Blake from such a company have a peculiar value. Linnell afterwards wrote that "to many he spoke so that 'hearing they might *not* hear.'" Much that has been received has been of this kind. At one of the houses to which Linnell took him, in 1825, for example, Blake met Crabb Robinson again. Crabb Robinson kept a diary; and for this diary he gathered material. He therefore visited Blake at Fountain Court, and made careful records of his conversations with Blake. These records have an assorted value. They were undoubtedly faithfully kept. Nothing was set down otherwise than as it was said or observed; but it is apparent that some things were said in order that Crabb Robinson might not be enlightened; and in that they seem to have succeeded admirably. Sometimes, when his visitor seems to be satisfied as to Blake's meaning, it is not difficult to see Blake mystifying him. On the other hand, in some of the opinions faithfully set down but described as unintelligible, Blake's accent may be plainly heard, and his meaning as plainly understood.

For example, Crabb Robinson records that " among the unintelligible sentiments which he was continually expressing is his distinction between the natural and the spiritual world. The natural world must be consumed." This does not seem very unintelligible, even if Crabb Robinson had only read his New Testament. Then he quotes Blake as saying, " I do not believe the world is round. I believe it is quite flat." He adds, " I objected the circumnavigation. We were called to dinner at the moment, and I lost the reply "—which was, possibly, fortunate. At one point he records that a conversation with Blake was " amusing " but produced " no novelty." On another occasion he laments that Blake " was not in an *exalted* state." A diary kept in such a mood is obviously one to be used with care. Crabb Robinson's diary is an assortment of facts, observations, bewilderments containing statements of value, and records of occasions when Blake seems to have spoken so that hearing his curious visitor might not hear.

It is not always easy to disentangle these; yet some of the statements are revealing. He describes Blake, for example, as having " a most interesting appearance. He is now old—pale with a Socratic countenance, and an expression of great sweetness, but bordering on weakness—except when his features are animated by expression, and then he has an air of inspiration about him." He records Blake as saying, " I should be sorry if I had any earthly fame, for whatever natural glory a man has is so much detracted from his spiritual glory. I wish to do nothing for profit. I wish to live for art. I want nothing whatever. I am quite happy." These words have the more important testimony of Linnell; and the still more important testimony of Blake's life. " Of the faculty of Vision," he writes, Blake " spoke as one he has had from early infancy. He thinks all men partake of it, but it is lost by not being cultivated. And he eagerly assented to a remark I made, that all men have all faculties to a greater or lesser degree."

Of Voltaire he records a penetrating judgment by Blake, set down in Blake's speech: " I have had much intercourse with Voltaire, and he said to me, ' I blasphemed the Son of Man, and it shall be forgiven me. But they (the enemies of Voltaire) blasphemed the Holy Ghost in me, and it shall not be forgiven them.' " Elsewhere he quotes Blake as saying, " I have never known a very bad man who had not something very good about him." To Crabb Robinson he said: " I saw Milton in imagination, and he told me to beware of being misled by his *Paradise Lost*. In particular he wished me to show the falsehood of his doctrine that the pleasures of sex arose from the Fall. The Fall could not produce any pleasure."

Of more virtue are the testimonies and records of his new friends. To them he spoke for their help and understanding. When Samuel Palmer first met him in 1824, for example, Blake looked on him and asked: "Do you work with fear and trembling?" "Yes, indeed," Palmer answered. "Then you'll do," said Blake. On another occasion George Richmond came to him for help. His power of invention was failing him, he complained. Blake turned to his wife across the table: "What do we do, Kate, when the visions forsake us?" "We kneel down and pray, Mr. Blake," she answered. Richmond also states that Blake once informed him: "I can look at a knot in a piece of wood till I am frightened at it." In these two qualities of dependence from what he might receive in vision and an intense power of visualisation, all Blake's work might be said to be comprised.

5

Perhaps it was because of the opposition Dante was constantly stirring in him that Blake, in the last year of his life, prepared the beginnings of a new work. This was a reinterpretation of *Genesis*, chapter by chapter. The text was illuminated in green, each chapter receiving a title giving Blake's interpretation. The pages were adorned by illustrations to signify that interpretation. Only four chapter-headings were completed. The first is entitled *The Creation of the Natural Man;* the second *The Natural Man divided into Male and Female and of the Tree of Life and of the Tree of Good and Evil;* the third *Of the Sexual Nature and the Fall into Generation and Death;* the fourth *How Generation and Death took possession of the Natural Man and of the Forgiveness of Sins written upon the Murderer's Forehead.*

To judge from these titles, the new work was evidently to include all Blake's teaching on the meaning of the Fall and the nature of Man's spiritual life. In one of the rejected drawings for the title-page, for example, there is an obvious attempt to identify the Four Evangelists with the Four Zoas. The brand on Cain's forehead, he announces, was to signify his forgiveness. Yet it is not possible to say much of this new project, for he only completed three pages, and part of the fourth, with seven further pages roughly sketched in pencil. His chief task at this time were the illustrations to Dante; and while he was at work on these the end came.

In February, 1826, he wrote to Linnell regretting that he could not come to see him "for I am again laid up by a cold in my stomach." In May he wrote: "I have had another desperate shivering fit. . . . It

began by a gnawing pain in my stomach, and soon spread a deadly feel all over my limbs; when I am forced to go to bed, where I contrive to get into a little perspiration, which takes it quite away." So he continued throughout that year. In April of the following year he wrote to his old friend George Cumberland: "I have been very near the gates of death, and have returned very weak, and an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination, which liveth for ever. In that I am stronger and stronger, as this foolish body decays." The previous December his old misunderstanding friend Flaxman had passed; and in this letter he refers to his going. "Flaxman is gone, and we must soon follow, everyone to his own eternal home, leaving the delusions of Goddess Nature and her laws of the numbers—into the mind, in which everyone is king and priest in his own house. God grant it on earth, as it is in heaven."

He passed on Sunday, August 12, 1827. There are several records of the manner of his going; and they all agree. The best is that by Tatham, whom he had met in 1826. "Life," writes Tatham, "like a dying flame flashed once more, gave one more burst of animation, during which he was cheerful, and free from the tortures of his approaching end; he thought he was better, and, as he was sure to do, asked to look at the work over which he was occupied when seized with his last attack. It was a coloured print of the Ancient of Days striking the first circle of the Earth, done expressly for the writer of this. After he had worked upon it he exclaimed: 'There, I have done all I can! It is the best I have ever finished. I hope Mr. Tatham will like it.' He threw it suddenly down and said: 'Kate, you have been a good wife; I will draw your portrait.' She sat near his bed, and he made a drawing which, though not a likeness, is finely touched and expressed. He then threw that down after having drawn for an hour, and began to sing Hallelujahs and songs of joy and triumph which Mrs. Blake described as being truly sublime in music and in verse; he sang loudly and with true ecstatic energy, and seemed so happy that he had finished his course, that he had run his race, and that he was shortly to arrive at the goal, to receive the prize of his high and eternal calling. After having answered a few questions concerning his wife's means of living after his decease, and after having spoken of the writer of this as a likely person to become the manager of her affairs, his spirit departed like the sighing of a gentle breeze, and he slept in company with the mighty ancestors he had formerly depicted. . . . Such was the entertainment of the last hour of his life. His bursts of glad-

ness made the room peal again. The walls rang and resounded with the beatific symphony."

He was buried in Bunhill Fields; and for long the site of his grave was lost. His best epitaph, however, was not written there. There was one man best fitted to write it. That man was John Linnell; and he has done so. "He was," wrote John Linnell three years afterwards, "more like the ancient patterns of virtue than I ever expected to see in this world; he feared nothing so much as being rich, lest he should lose his spiritual riches. He was at the same time the most sublime in his expressions, with the simplicity and gentleness of a child, though never wanting in energy when called for." "His was not a mind to dictate to," wrote Bernard Barton, Linnell's Quaker friend in 1830; "and what he has done is quite enough to stamp him as a genius of the highest order. A still prouder and more enduring meed of praise is due to the excellence and sterling worth of the man: his child-like simplicity, his manly independence, his noble aspirations after the purest and loftiest of all fame, appear to me to form a singular union of those virtues which distinguished the better citizens of Greece and Rome with the milder graces which adorned the primitive Apostles. To have been the friend of such a man is a proud and enviable distinction."

LIST OF SOME BOOKS CONSULTED

Life of William Blake. By Alexander Gilchrist. First edition, 1863. Enlarged edition, in two vols. 1880.

The Letters of William Blake, together with His Life by F. Tatham. Edited by A. G. B. Russell. 1906.

The Real Blake. By Edwin J. Ellis. 1907.

William Blake, with records from contemporary sources. By Arthur Symons. 1907.

The Life of John Linnell. Two vols. By Alfred T. Story. 1892.

The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer. By A. H. Palmer. 1892.

A Memoir of Edward Calvert. By his Third Son. 1893.

The Works of William Blake : Poetic, Symbolic and Critical. Three vols. By Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats. 1893.

The Poetical Works of William Blake. Two vols. Edited and annotated by Edwin J. Ellis. 1906.

Blake's Poetical Works. Edited by John Sampson. 1905.

The Poetical Works of Blake. Edited by John Sampson. 1913.

The Prophetic Books of William Blake : Jerusalem. Edited by E. R. D. Maclagan and A. G. B. Russell. 1904.

The Prophetic Books of William Blake : Milton. Edited by E. R. D. Maclagan and A. G. B. Russell. 1907.

The Rossetti Papers. A Compilation by W. M. Rossetti. 1903.

The Engravings of William Blake. By Archibald G. B. Russell. 1912.

The Drawings and Engravings of William Blake. By Laurence Binyon. 1922.

A Bibliography of William Blake. By Geoffrey Keynes. 1921.

Some Anecdotes of the Life of Julio Bonasone, followed by a Catalogue of his Engravings. By George Cumberland. 1793.

William Blake : Painter and Poet. By Richard Garnett. 1895.

William Blake : Poet and Mystic. By P. Berger. Authorised Translation. 1914.

Blake's Vision of the Book of Job. By Joseph Wicksteed. 1910. Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. 1924.

Blake and Milton. By Denis Saurat. Paris, 1920.

William Blake : His Philosophy and Symbols. By S. Foster Damon. 1924.

This does not, of course, purport to be a bibliography of any kind. It merely gives a list of books to which definite reference has been made from time to time, for consent or dissent as the case might be. From a much more ample list, read during many years, deposits have been left. *The Writings of William Blake,* edited by Geoffrey Keynes, this year, came too late for service. It was an old project of mine, planned when the present volume was planned, in 1913, to have done just such a book, the two to shoulder one another as companions. As Geoffrey Keynes just came in time to prevent me, I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my admiration of his care and industry.

D. F.

PREFACE ON THE PLAN OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Careful thought has been given to the order in which the pictures reproduced in this volume should be presented. The order that first suggested itself was that of date. It was a very obvious suggestion; and did not prove difficult to complete. Many of Blake's pictures are undated; but, with a few exceptions, there is not much difficulty in knowing, at least with approximate accuracy, when they were done. There is a danger, to be sure, in assuming that an undated picture painted by a certain method, in a certain manner, with certain characteristics, was done at or about the same time as some other picture, of the same method, manner and characteristics, on which a date appears. The danger is a familiar one; and needs to be remembered; but, with that saving reminder, the task of determining an order for these reproductions by sequence of date did not prove formidable.

Then it was that the problem began. It was apparent, directly this was done, that the result was a mere evasion. It was worse: it was to run to pedantry for refuge; and the retreat could not honestly be made to look brave by pointing to the faults of others. It could not even be dignified by the name of a decision; for it decided nothing whatever. The order of a man's life is not the order in which his days are lived, but the order which his mind gives to those days. Habit is a form of death; intention is an aspect of life. It was only necessary to array these reproductions in the order of their making to be troubled constantly by the thought of a virtue that seemed to have gone out of them. They had become a series of Blake's exercises in art, rather an output of his mind, the creation of his imagination.

This loss of virtue was something deeper than can be shown by illustration. Yet an instance may be given of one of the effects. Between 1807 and 1810 Blake was occupied, at different times and while dealing with other subjects, painting a series of pictures in illustration of the life of Christ. The *Paradise Regained*, done about 1808, belongs evidently to this period, and may, in fact, have inspired the series. It was absurd to intersperse the members of a coherent series such as this with other drawings, whatever their dates. That is not all. The water-colour drawings of the series painted during these years included none dealing with the childhood of Christ's life. The reason for this seems obvious. In the period between 1798 and 1801, when he was working largely in tempera, he had already painted a series of pictures dealing with that childhood. It would

appear, therefore, that he intended the later drawings to follow these earlier paintings, to make one series illustrating the life of his Supreme Artist. That was his intention. That was manifestly the imprint of his mind on these tempera-paintings and water-colour drawings. To destroy that imprint by interspersing them with others dealing with different subjects, because of an arbitrary order of chronology, cannot be any sort of service to Blake.

There is, in fact, only one order of presentation that can have any virtue—if that order could be ascertained. It is the order that Blake himself would choose. Be sure he would not have given any fealty to the tame succession of years. In spite of all difficulties, this order can with some justice be seen. For example, when he on his death-bed flung aside the last copy of *The Ancient of Days*, saying that it was " the best he had ever finished," it is certain that he would have chosen this to be the first to be seen in a collection, not the last. Similarly, it seems that he desired *Satan in his Original Glory* and *Satan Calling up his Legions* to be seen together. It is obvious that *Satan Exulting Over Eve* and *The Elohim Creating Adam* are contrasted designs. It is even more important that *The Death of the First-Born, David and Goliath* and *The Ghost of a Flea* should be seen together, for reasons mentioned elsewhere.

So one might continue. I do not pretend to have succeeded as I would like. I have created enough unhappiness and dissatisfaction in my own mind to be sure that I will have caused much more in the minds of others. But I have preferred to entertain the time, thought and perplexity for myself, and necessary criticism from others, by facing this problem, than successfully to evade both by running away from it, and taking refuge with an unimpeachable chronology. I have done this, however, with one desire only, that William Blake might be the better served.

My deepest thanks are rendered to the owners of Blake's pictures who have allowed their reproduction. A considerable portion of this volume consists of reproductions of pictures that have not been reproduced before. Among those which have not, to my knowledge, been reproduced before are those which come from Lord Leconfield; from General Archibald Stirling; a number of those from Mr. W. Graham Robertson; the *Paradise Regained* series and the design from *Europe* from Mr. T. H. Riches; the *Paradise Lost* series, the *Comus* series, and a number of others, from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.; those from the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.; as well as others from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Whitworth Institute,

Manchester, the National Gallery of Scotland, The National Gallery, Millbank, Miss Dodge, Mr. Alan Barlow, Mr. Frank T. Sabin and Mr. Francis Edwards. The present collection, therefore, consists of reproductions of a considerable number of pictures that have not been available before for such reproduction; and I am deeply indebted to the owners, not only for permission to reproduce them, but for the unfailing courtesy and kindness that they have at all times given. Only in one case, from the United States, was this courtesy not forthcoming.

My equal thanks are due to Professor Bateson, F.R.S., Miss Carthew, Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Morse and Mr. Edward Marsh for permission to reproduce pictures from their collections. I would like to make particular acknowledgment of the hospitality and help I have always received from those who have, in fact, collaborated in the making of this book. It would be invidious to mention names where help was always so heartily given; yet it is necessary to mention Lady Leconfield, General and Mrs. Stirling, Mr. Aitken, Curator of the gallery at Millbank, whose patience was, I fear, so often so sorely tried, Mr. Laurence Binyon, whose help was always available, and, last but not least, to Mr. Graham Robertson. I shall always affectionately remember Mr. Graham Robertson's sympathy and encouragement at a time of need.

DARRELL FIGGIS.

DUBLIN,

June, 1925.

PLATES

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS (1827). Coloured Print. $9\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{5}{8}$.
Whitworth Institute, Manchester.

He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe
This Universe, and all created things :
One foot he center'd, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profunditie obscure,
And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds,
This be this just circumference, O World.

Paradise Lost, Book VII, 225–231.

When he prepared the heavens, I was there : when he set a compass upon the face of the depth.

Proverbs viii. 27.

(*Note* —This print was originally done as a frontispiece for *Europe : A Prophecy*. The copy reproduced here is that to which Tatham refers in his *Life of William Blake* bound with his copy of *Jerusalem*, now in the possession of General Archibald Stirling. "Life, however, like a dying flame, flashed once more, gave one more burst of animation, during which he was cheerful, and free from the tortures of his approaching end ; he thought he was better, and, as he was sure to do, asked to look at the work over which he was occupied when seized with his last attack. It was a coloured print of the Ancient of Days striking the first circle of the Earth, done expressly by commission for the writer of this. After he had worked upon it he exclaimed : 'There, I have done all I can ! It is the best I have ever finished. I hope Mr. Tatham will like it.'")

THE ANGEL OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE CLOTHING ADAM AND EVE WITH COATS OF SKINS (1803). Water Colour. 15⅛ × 11¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

GOD BLESSING THE SEVENTH DAY (*c.* about 1803). Water Colour. 16½ × 14.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS CASTING DOWN THEIR CROWNS BEFORE THE DIVINE THRONE (1805). Water Colour. 14 × 11½.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

> And round about the throne were four-and-twenty seats; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty Elders sitting, clothed in white raiment: and they had on their heads crowns of gold. . . .
>
> And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were Four Zoas full of eyes before and behind. And the first Zoa was like a lion, and the second Zoa like a calf, and the third Zoa had a face as a man, and the fourth Zoa was like a flying eagle. And the Four Zoas had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within. And they rest not night and day, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." And when these Zoas give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty Elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne. . . .
>
> And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the Four Zoas, and in the midst of the Elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.
>
> *Revelation* iv. and v.

(*Note.*—The word translated "beasts" in the Authorised Version is ζώων; whence the Four Zoas of Blake's Prophetic Books.)

THE RIVER OF LIFE (*c.* about 1805). Water Colour.
16 × 14¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

> And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
>
> *Revelation* xxii. 1, 2.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (1807).
Water-coloured Drawing.

British Museum.

(*Note.*—This was one of the unused designs for *The Grave*. It is usually described as a design for the title-page; but it is probable that it is the design for the dedication which Cromek returned to Blake with a letter, dated May, 1807, beginning: "SIR,—I received, not without surprise, your letter demanding four guineas for the *sketched* vignette dedicated to the Queen. I have returned the drawing with this note, and I will briefly state my reasons for so doing. In the first place, I do not think it merits the price you affix to it, *under any circumstances*. Etc." Professor Bateson, F.R.S., has a pencil-sketch of this design in which the space left for the dedication is vignetted.)

PLATE 7

THE LAST JUDGMENT (1808). Water Colour. 19⅞ × 15¾. *Lord Leconfield.*

"... The design of 'The Last Judgment,' which I have just completed, by your recommendation for the Countess of Egremont, it is necessary to give some account of; and its various parts ought to be described, for the accommodation of those who give it the honour of their attention.

"Christ seated on the throne of judgment: before His feet and around Him the heavens, in clouds, are rolling like a scroll, ready to be consumed in the fires of angels, who descend with the four trumpets sounding to the four winds.

"Beneath, the earth is convulsed with the labours of the resurrection. In the caverns of the earth is the Dragon with seven heads and ten horns, chained by two angels; and above his cavern, on the earth's surface, is the Harlot, seized and bound by two angels with chains, while her palaces are falling into ruins, and her counsellors and warriors are descending into the abyss, in wailing and despair.

"Hell opens beneath the Harlot's seat in the left hand, into which the wicked are descending.

"The right hand of the design is appropriated to the resurrection of the just; the left hand of the design is appropriated to the resurrection and fall of the wicked.

"Immediately before the throne of Christ are Adam and Eve, kneeling in humiliation, as representatives of the whole human race. Abraham and Moses kneel on each side beneath them. From the cloud on which Eve kneels, is seen Satan, wound round by the serpent, and falling headlong. The Pharisees appear on the left hand, pleading their own righteousness before the throne of Christ and before the Book of Death, which is opened on clouds by two Angels. Many groups are falling from before the throne, and from the sea of fire which flows before the steps of the throne, on which are seen the seven lamps of the Almighty, burning before the throne. Many figures, chained and bound together, and in various attitudes of despair and horror, fall through the air, and some are scourged by spirits with flames of fire into the abyss of Hell which opens beneath, on the left hand of the Harlot's seat; where others are howling and descending into the flames, and in the act of dragging each other into Hell, and of contending and fighting with each other on the brink of perdition.

"Before the throne of Christ on the right hand, the just, in humiliation and and in exultation rise through the air with their children and families, some of whom are bowing before the Book of Life, which is opened on clouds by two Angels. Many groups arise in exultation; among them is a figure crowned with stars, and the moon beneath her feet, with six infants around her—she represents the Christian Church. Green hills appear beneath with the graves of the blessed, which are seen bursting with their births of immortality. Parents and children, wives and husbands, embrace and arise together, and in exulting multitudes tell each other that the New Jerusalem is ready to descend upon earth; they arise upon the air rejoicing. Others, newly awaked from the grave, stand upon the earth embracing and shouting to the Lamb, who cometh in the clouds with power and great glory.

"The whole upper part of the design is a view of Heaven opened, around the throne of Christ. In the clouds, which roll away, are the four living creatures filled with eyes, attended by seven angels with seven vials of the wrath of God, and above these, seven angels with the seven trumpets. These compose the cloud which, by its rolling away, displays the opening seats of the blessed; on the right and the left of which are seen the four-and-twenty elders seated on thrones to judge the dead.

"Behind the seat and throne of Christ appear the Tabernacle with its veil opened, the Candlestick on the right, the Table with the Shewbread on the left, and, in the midst, the cross in place of the Ark, the Cherubim bowing over it.

"On the right hand of the throne of Christ is Baptism, on His left is the Lord's Supper—the two introducers into eternal life. Women with infants approach the figure of an apostle, which represents baptism; and on the left hand the Lord's Supper is administered by angels, from the hands of another aged apostle. These kneel on each side of the throne, which is surrounded by a glory: in the glory many infants appear, representing eternal creation flowing from the Divine Humanity in Jesus, who opens the scroll of judgment, upon His knees, before the living and the dead.

"Such is the design, which you, my dear sir, have been the cause of my producing, and which, but for you, might have slept till the Last Judgment."

Letter from William Blake to Ozias Humphrey, 18th February, 1808.

SATAN IN HIS ORIGINAL GLORY. Water Colour. $16\frac{7}{8} \times 13\frac{1}{2}$.
W. Graham Robertson.

Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold. The workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Thou art the appointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so. Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God. Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created—till iniquity was found in thee.

Ezekiel xxviii. 12–15.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning!

Isaiah xiv. 12.

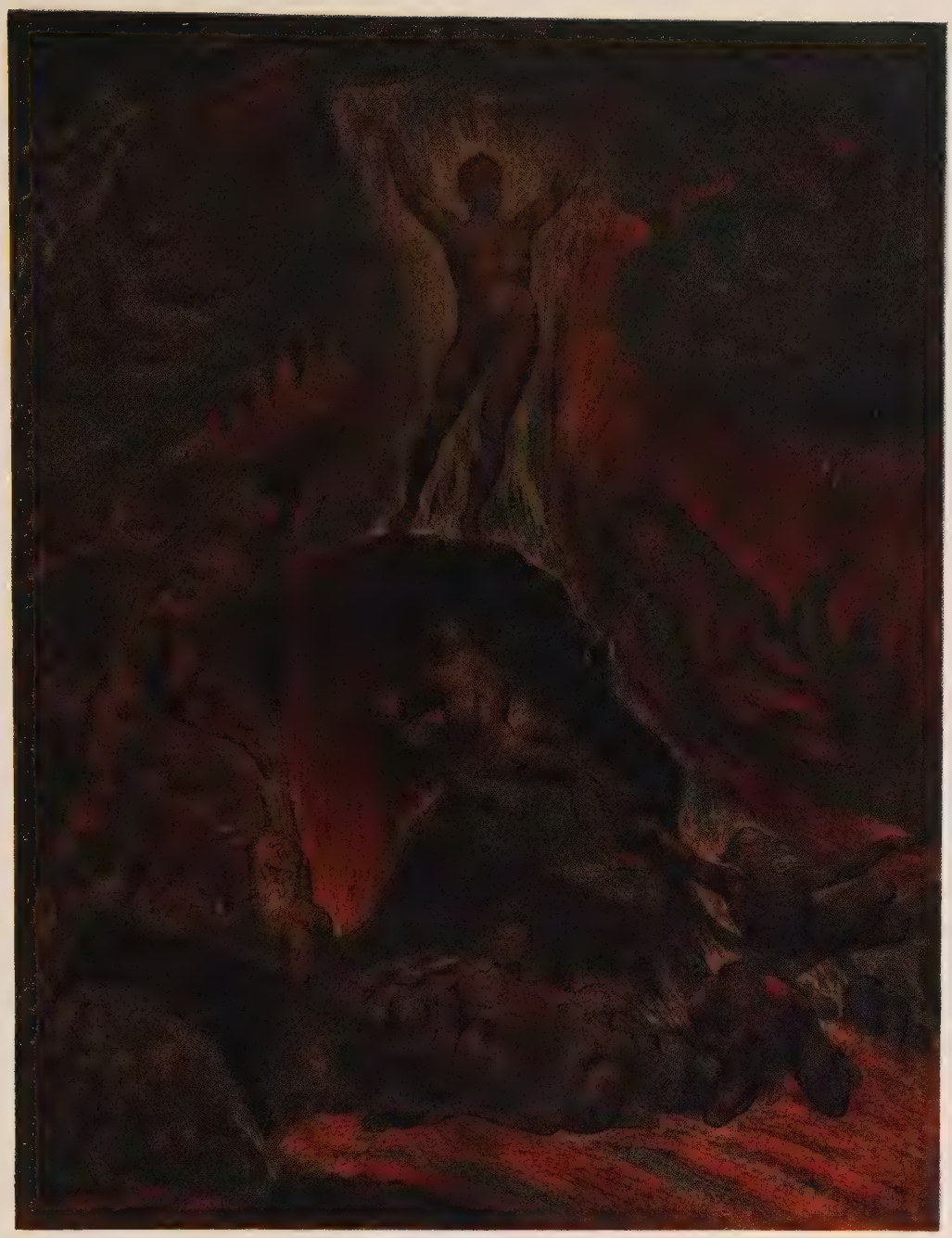
SATAN CALLING UP HIS LEGIONS (about 1808).
Tempera on Canvas. 21 × 16.

Lord Leconfield.

on the Beach
Of that inflamed Sea, he stood and call'd
His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't
Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
In *Vallombrosa*, where th' *Etrurian* shades
High overarch't imbower; or scatter'd sedge
Afloat, when with fierce Winds *Orion* arm'd
Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
Busiris and his *Memphian* Chivalrie,
While with perfidious hatred they pursu'd
The Sojourners of *Goshen*, who beheld
From the safe shore their floating Carkases
And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,
Under amazement of their hideous change.
He call'd so loud, that all the hollow Deep
Of Hell resounded. Princes, Potentates,
Warriors, the Flowr of Heav'n, once yours, now lost,
If such astonishment as this can seize
Eternal spirits; or have ye chos'n this place
After the toyl of Battel to repose
Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?
Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
To adore the Conquerour? who now beholds
Cherube and Seraph rowling in the Flood
With scatter'd Arms and Ensigns, til annon
His swift pursuers from Heav'n Gates discern
Th' advantage, and descending tread us down
Thus drooping, or with linked Thunderbolts
Transfix us to the bottom of this Gulfe.
Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.

Paradise Lost, Book I, 299–330.

(*Note.*—This is the "more perfect Picture" referred to in Blake's Note on Number IX of this *Descriptive Catalogue*. The Note runs: "Satan calling up his Legions, from Milton's *Paradise Lost*; a composition for a more perfect Picture afterward executed for a Lady of high rank. An experiment Picture." It is described by Blake as an "experiment on colours, without any oily vehicle.")



MICHAEL AND SATAN (*c.* about 1805). Water Colour. 14 × 12⅞.

The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard, U.S.A.

And there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven.

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the Earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye Heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time."

Revelation xii. 10–12.

EVE TEMPTED BY THE SERPENT (*c.* about 1799).
Tempera on Copper. 10 × 14⅜.
General Archibald Stirling.

SATAN EXULTING OVER EVE (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 16¾ × 21.

W. Bateson, Esq., F.R.S.

THE ELOHIM CREATING ADAM (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. $17\frac{3}{4} \times 21$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

1. "FATHER, THY WORD IS PASSED." Water Colour.
$15\frac{3}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{4}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Father, thy word is passed, man shall find grace;
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought,
Happie for man, so coming.

III, 227 onwards.

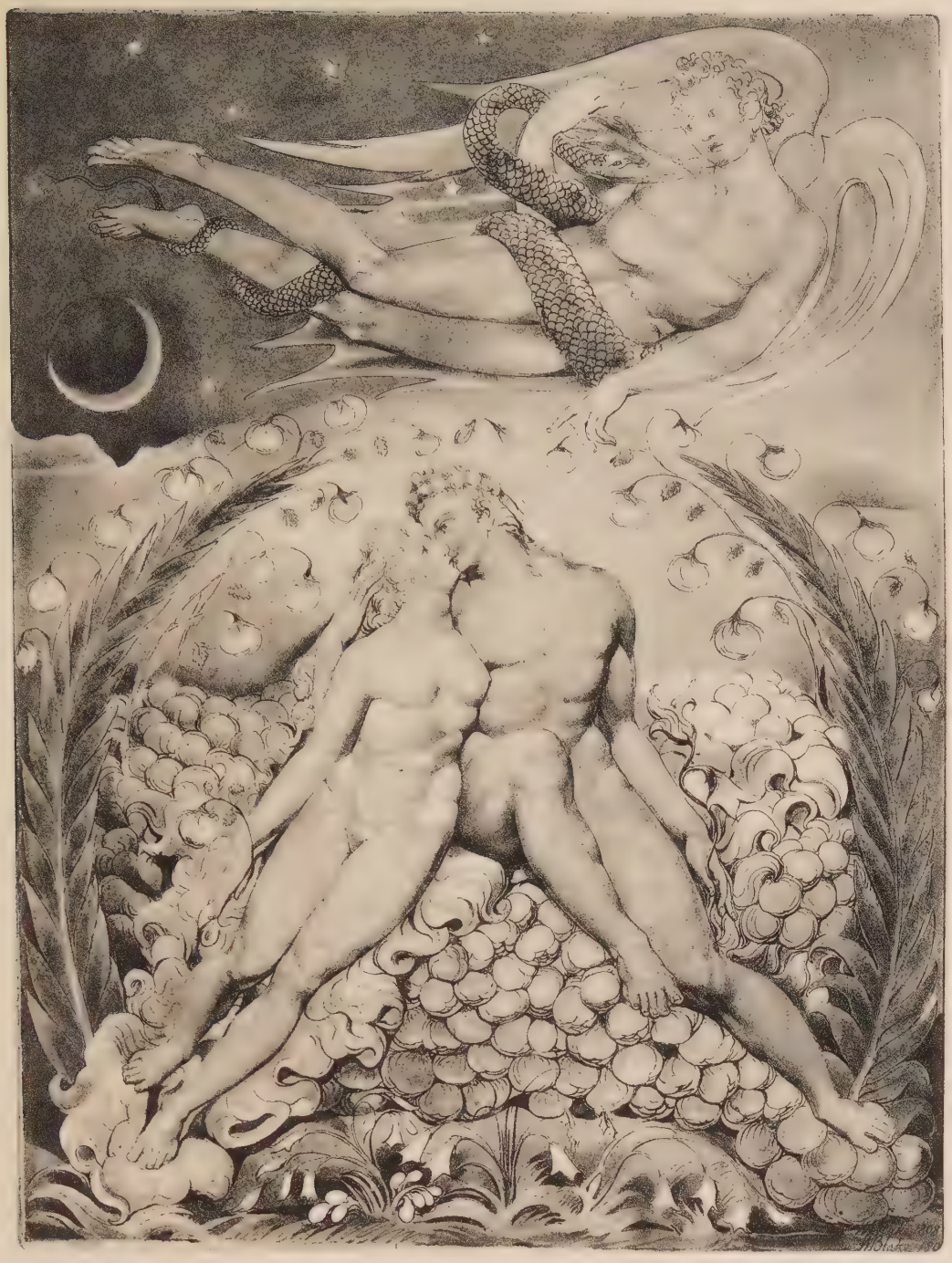
"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

2. SATAN WITH ADAM AND EVE. Water Colour.
$15\frac{3}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{16}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Ah gentle pair, yee little think how nigh
Your change approaches, when all these delights
Will vanish and deliver ye to woe,
More woe, the more your taste is now of joy;
Happie, but for so happie ill secur'd
Long to continue, and this high seat your Heav'n
Ill fenc't for Heav'n to keep out such a foe
As now is enter'd.

IV, 366–373.



"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

3. ADAM AND EVE SLEEPING. Water Colour. $14\frac{9}{16} \times 19$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Ithuriel and *Zephon*, with wingd speed
Search through this Garden, leav unsearcht no nook,
But chiefly where those two fair Creatures Lodge,
Now laid perhaps asleep secure of harme.
This Evening from the Sun's decline arriv'd
Who tells of som infernal Spirit seen
Hitherward bent (who could have thought ?) escap'd
The barrs of Hell, on errand bad no doubt :
So saying, on he led his radiant Files,
Daz'ling the Moon ; these to the Bower direct
In search of whom they sought : him there they found
Squat like a Toad, close at the eare of *Eve*.

IV, 788–800.

"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

4. RAPHAEL WITH ADAM AND EVE. Water Colour.
$15\frac{3}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{8}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Meanwhile at Table *Eve*
Minister'd naked, and thir flowing cups
With pleasant liquors crown'd: O innocence
Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,
Then had the Sons of God excuse to have bin
Enamour'd at that sight; but in those hearts
Love unlibidinous reign'd, nor jealousie
Was understood, the injur'd Lovers Hell.

V, 443–450.

"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

5. THE DOWNFALL OF THE REBEL ANGELS. Water Colour. $15\frac{3}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{8}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

The overthrown he rais'd, and as a Heard
Of Goats or timerous flock together throngd
Drove them before him Thunder-struck, pursu'd
With terrors and with furies to the bounds
And Chrystall wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,
Rowld inward, and a spacious Gap disclos'd
Into the wastful Deep; the monstrous sight
Strook them with horror backward, but far worse
Urg'd them behind; headlong themselve they threw
Down from the verge of Heav'n, Eternal wrauth
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

VI, 854–866.

"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

6. THE CREATION OF EVE. Water Colour. $15\frac{5}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Under his forming hands a Creature grew,
Manlike, but different sex, so lovly faire,
That what seemed fair in all the World, seemd now
Mean, or in her summd up, in her containd
And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
And into all things from her Aire inspir'd
The spirit of love and amorous delight.
VIII, 470–477.

"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

7. THE TEMPTATION OF EVE. Water Colour. $15\frac{3}{16} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Eve
Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
Regarded, such delight till then, as seemd,
In Fruit she never tasted, whether true
Or fansied so, through expectation high
Of knowledg, nor was God-head from her thought.
Greedily she ingorg'd without restraint,
And knew not eating Death.

IX, 785–792.

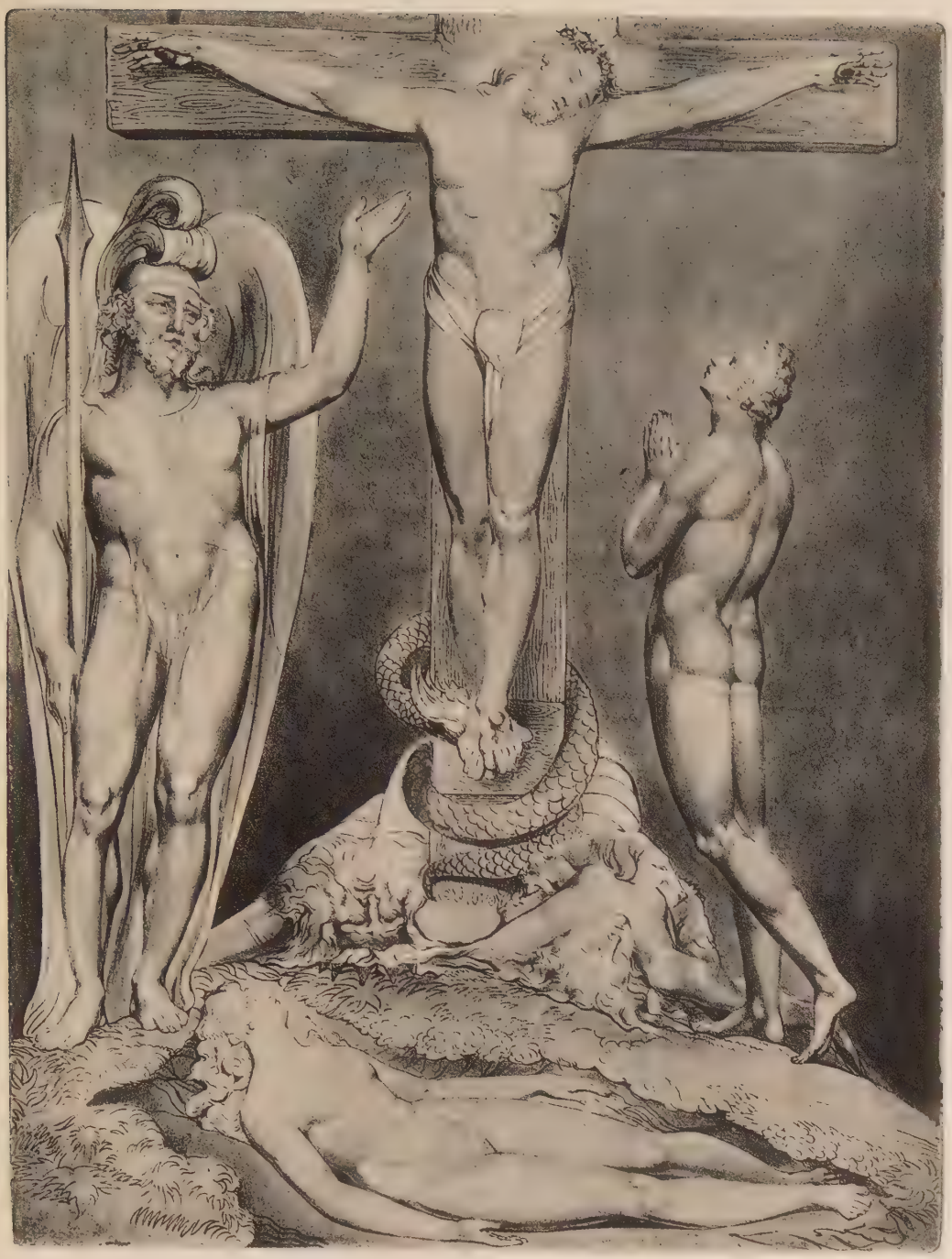
"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

8. THE PROPHECY OF THE CRUCIFIXION. Water Colour. $14\frac{8}{10} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

For this he shall live hated, be blasphem'd,
Seis'd on by force, judg'd, and to death condemnd
A shameful and accurst, naild to the Cross
By his own Nation, slaine for bringing Life;
But to the Cross he nailes they Enemies,
The Law that is against thee, and the sins
Of all mankinds, with him there crucifi'd,
Never to hurt them more who rightly trust
In this his satisfaction.

XII, 411–419.

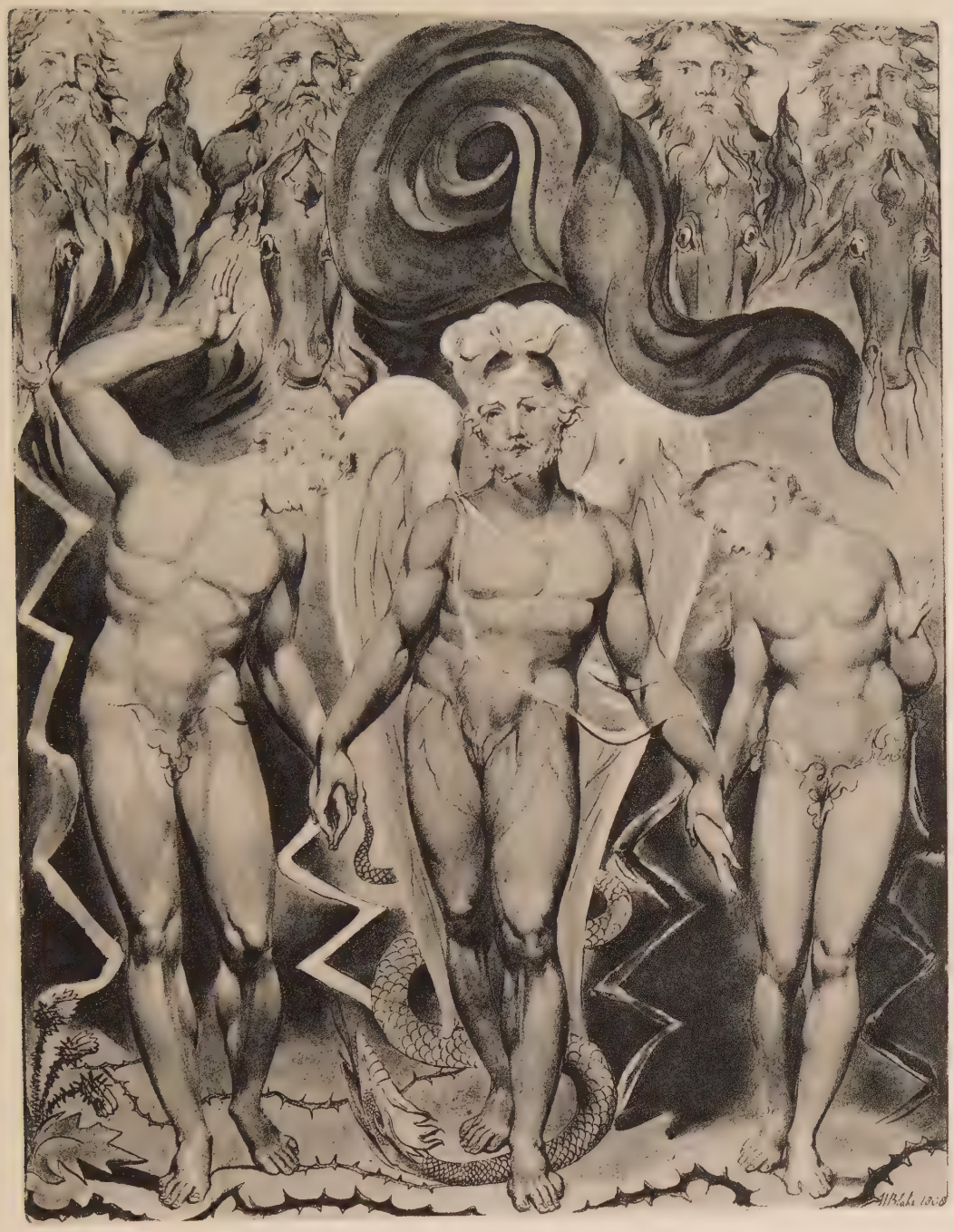


"PARADISE LOST" SERIES (1808)

9. THE EXPULSION FROM EDEN. Water Colour. $14\frac{9}{10} \times 19\frac{1}{8}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

In either hand the hastning Angel caught
Our lingring Parents, and to th' Eastern Gate
Led them direct, and down the Cliff as fast
To the subjected Plaine.

XII, 637–640.



"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c* 1807 or 1808)

1. CHRIST AND JOHN THE BAPTIST WITH TWO ANGELS. Water Colour. 6⅛ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

To his great Baptism flock'd
With aw the Regions round, and with them came
From *Nazareth* the Son of *Joseph* deem'd
To the flood *Jordan*, came as then obscure,
Unmark't, unknown; but him the Baptist soon
Descri'd, divinely warn'd, and witness bore
As to his worthier, and would have resign'd
To him his Heavenly Office.

I, 21–28.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c* 1807 or 1808)

2. THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST. Water Colour. 6¼ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Nor was long
His witness unconfirm'd : on him baptiz'd
Heaven open'd, and in likeness of a Dove
The Spirit descended, while the fathers voice
From Heav'n pronounc'd him his beloved Son
That heard the Adversary, who roving still
About the world, at that assembly fam'd
Would not be last, and with the voice divine
Nigh Thunder-struck, th' exalted man, to whom
Such high attest was giv'n, a while survey'd
With wonder, then with envy fraught and rage
Flies to his place. . . .

I, 29–39.

WBlake inv

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

3. THE FIRST TEMPTATION. Water Colour. 6½ × 5¼.
T. H. Riches, Esq.

But now an aged man in Rural weeds,
Following, as seem'd, the quest of some stray Ewe,
Or wither'd sticks to gather; which might serve
Against a Winters day when winds blow keen,
To warn him wet return'd from field at Eve,
He saw approach, who first with curious eye
Perus'd him, then with words thus utt'red spake.

W Blake

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c* 1807 or 1808)

4. MARY AT HER DISTAFF, WATCHED BY TWO ANGELS.
Water Colour. 6⅛ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Thus Mary pondering oft, and oft to mind
Recalling what remarkably had pass'd
Since first her Salutation heard, with thoughts
Meekly compos'd awaited the fulfilling.

II, 105–108.

WBlake inv.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

5. SATAN IN COUNCIL. Water Colour. 6¼ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

For Satan with slye preface to return
Had left him vacant, and with speed was gon
Up to the middle Region of thick Air,
Where all his Potentates in Council sate.

II, 115–118.

WBlake inv

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c* 1807 or 1808)

6. CHRIST REFUSING THE BANQUET OFFERED BY SATAN. Water Colour. 6¼ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Our Saviour lifting up his eyes beheld
In ample space under the broadest shade
A Table richly spred, in regal mode,
With dishes pil'd, and meats of noblest sort
And savour, Beasts of chase, or Fowl of game,
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boyl'd,
Gris-amber-steam'd; all Fish from Sea or Shore,
Freshet, or purling brook, of shell or fin,
And exquisitest name, for which was drain'd
Pontus and *Lucrine* Bay, and *Afric* Coast.
Alas how simple, to these Cates compar'd,
Was that crude Apple that diverted *Eve!*
And at a stately side-board by the wine

That fragrant smell diffus'd, in order stood
Tall stripling youths rich clad, of fairer hew
Then *Ganymed* or *Hylas*, distant more
Under the Trees now trip'd, now solemn stood
Nymphs of *Diana's* train, and *Naiades*
With fruits and flowers from *Amalthea's* horn,
And Ladies of th' *Hesperides*, that seem'd
Fairer then feign'd of old, or fabl'd since
Of Fairy Damsels met in Forests wide
By Knights of *Logres*, or of *Lyones*,
Lancelot, or *Pelleas*, or *Pellenore*,
And all the while Harmonious Airs were heard
Of chiming strings, or charming pipes and winds
Of gentlest gale *Arabian* odors fann'd
From their soft wings, and *Flora's* earliest smells.
Such was the Splendour, and the Tempter now
His invitation earnestly renew'd.

II, 338–367.

W Blake inv

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

7. THE SECOND TEMPTATION: SATAN DISPLAYING THE KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH. Water Colour. 6½ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

To whom our Saviour calmly thus reply'd.
Thus neither dost perswade me to seek wealth
For Empire's sake, nor Empire to affect
For glories sake for all thy argument.
For what is glory but the blaze of fame,
The peoples praise, if always praise unmixt?
And what the people but a herd confus'd,
A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
Things vulgar, & well weigh'd, scarce worth the praise,
They praise and they admire they know not what;
And know not whom, but as one leads the other;
And what delight to be by such extoll'd,
To live upon thir tongues and be thir talk,
Of whom to be disprais'd were no small praise?
His lot who dares be singularly good.
Th' intelligent among them and the wise
Are few, and glory scarce of few is rais'd.

III, 43–59.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

8. CHRIST'S TROUBLED DREAM. Water Colour. $6\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Our Saviour meek and with untroubl'd mind
After his aerie jaunt, though hurried sore,
Hungry and cold betook him to his rest,
Wherever, under some concourse of shades
Whose branching arms thick intertwin'd might shield
From dews and damps of night his shelter'd head,
But shelter'd slept in vain, for at his head
The Tempter watch'd, and soon with ugly dreams
Disturb'd his sleep; and either Tropic now
'Gan thunder, and both ends of Heav'n, the Clouds
From many a horrid rift abortive pour'd
Fierce rain with lightning mixt, water with fire
In ruine reconcil'd: nor slept the winds
Within thir stony caves, but rush'd abroad
From the four hinges of the world, and fell
On the vext Wilderness, whose tallest Pines,
Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest Oaks
Bow'd thir Stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts,
Or torn up sheer: ill wast thou shrouded then,
O patient Son of God, yet only stood'st
Unshaken; not yet staid the terror there,
Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round
Environ'd thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,
Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou
Sat'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace.

IV, 401–425.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

9. MORNING CHASING AWAY THE PHANTOMS. Water Colour. 6¼ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

And now the Sun with more effectual beams
Had cheard the face of Earth, and dryd the wet
From drooping plant, or dropping tree; the birds
Who all things now behold more fresh and green,
After a night of storm so ruinous,
Clear'd up their choicest notes in bush and spray
To gratulate the sweet return of morn.

IV, 432–438.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

10. THE THIRD TEMPTATION: CHRIST ON A PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE. Water Colour. 6¼ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

So saying he caught him up, and without wing
Of *Hippogrif* bore through the Air sublime
Over the Wilderness and o're the Plain;
Till underneath them fair *Jerusalem*,
The holy City lifted high her Towers,
And higher yet the glorious Temple rear'd
Her pile, far off appearing like a Mount
Of Alabaster, top't with golden Spires:
There on the highest Pinacle he set
The Son of God; and added thus in scorn:

IV, 541–550.

W Blake inv.

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

11. CHRIST MINISTERED TO BY ANGELS. Water Colour. $6\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Angelic Quires
Sung Heavenly Anthems of his victory
Over temptation, and the Tempter proud.

IV, 593–595.

Inv
WBlake

"PARADISE REGAINED" SERIES (*c.* 1807 or 1808)

12. CHRIST RETURNING TO MARY. Water Colour. 6½ × 5¼.

T. H. Riches, Esq.

Thus they the Son of God our Saviour meek
Sung Victor, and from Heavenly Feast refresht
Brought on his way with joy; hee unobserv'd
Home to his Mothers house private return'd.

IV, 636–639.

"HYMN ON THE NATIVITY" SERIES (1809)

1. THE DESCENT OF PEACE, AND NATURE'S ADORATION. Water Colour. 10 × 7½.

The Whitworth Institute, Manchester.

It was the Winter wilde,
While the Heav'n-born childe,
  All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
Nature in aw to him
Had dofft her gawdy trim,
  With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun her lusty Paramour.

Onely with speeches fair
She woo's the gentle Air
  To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinfull blame,
  The Saintly Vail of Maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Makers eyes
Should look so neer upon her foul deformities.

But he her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-ey'd Peace,
  She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphear,
His ready Harbinger,
  With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her mirtle wand,
She strikes a universall Peace through Sea and Land.

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, I–III.

"HYMN ON THE NATIVITY" SERIES (1809)

3. THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS. Water Colour. 10 × 7½.

The Whitworth Institute, Manchester.

At last surrounds their sight
A Globe of circular light,
  That with long beams the shame-fac't Night array'd,
The helmed Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim,
  Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displaid,
Harping in loud and solemn quire,
With unexpressive notes to Heav'ns new-born Heir.

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, XI.

"HYMN ON THE NATIVITY" SERIES (1809)

5. MOLOCH'S FLIGHT. Water Colour. 10 × 7½.

The Whitworth Institute, Manchester.

And sullen *Moloch* fled,
Hath left in shadows dred,
His burning Idol all of blackest hue,
In vain with Cymbals ring,
They call the grisly king,
In dismall dance about the furnace blue,
The brutish gods of *Nile* as fast,
Isis and *Orus*, and the Dog *Anubis* hast.

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, XXIII.

THE ANGEL APPEARING TO ZACHARIAS (*c.* about 1800).

Tempera on Canvas. 10 × 14⅜.

Miss Dodge.

And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel of the Lord said unto him, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Luke i. 8–13.

THE NATIVITY (*c.* about 1800). Tempera on Copper.
11 × 15.

Sydney Morse, Esq.

THE INFANT JESUS PRAYING. Water Colour.
12½ × 13½.

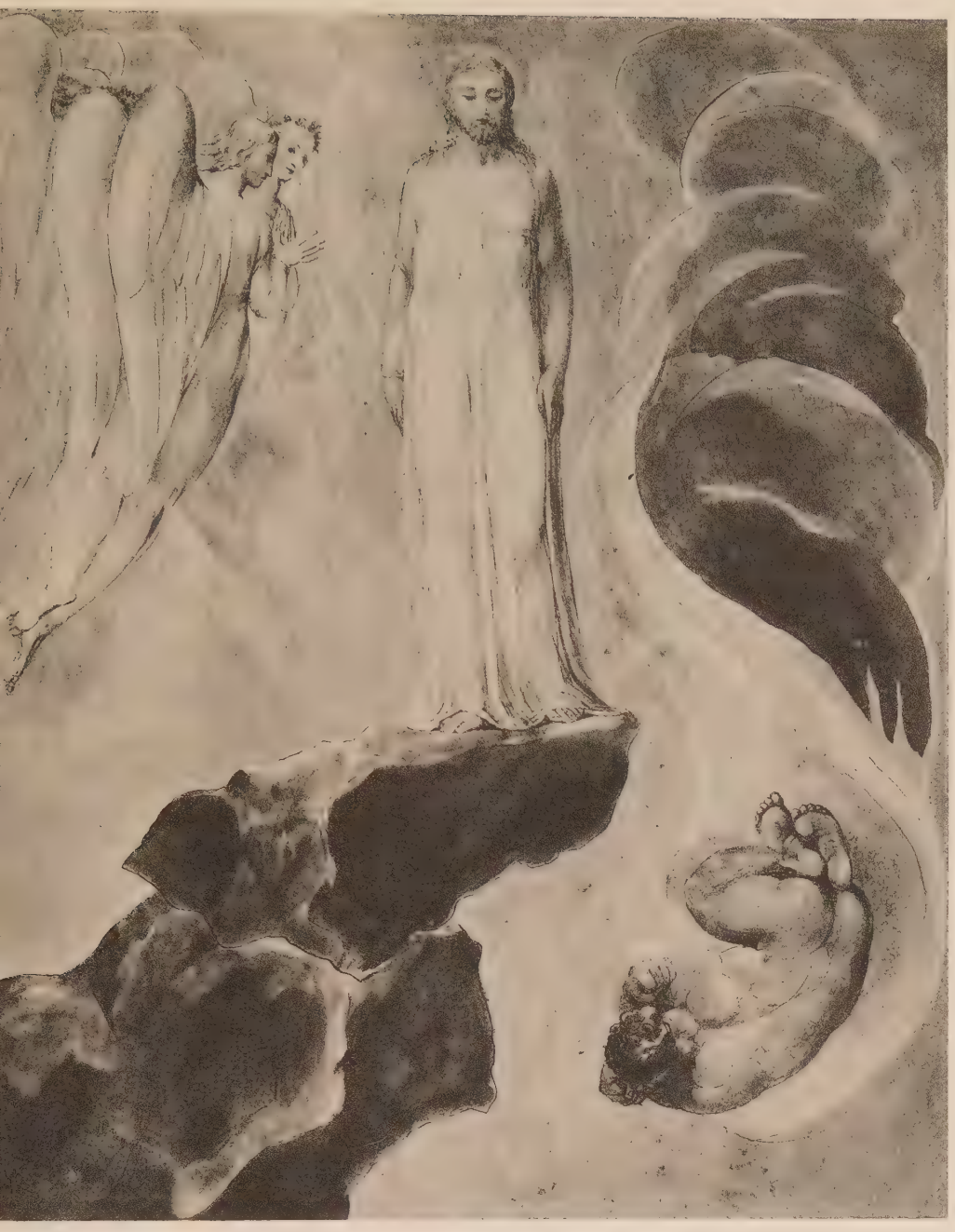
Mrs. Sydney Morse.

THE INFANT JESUS RIDING ON A LAMB
(1800). Tempera on Canvas. 10⅛ × 14½.
General Archibald Stirling.

CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN (1790).
Tempera on Canvas. $10\frac{1}{4} \times 14\frac{3}{4}$.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE TEMPTATION (*c.* about 1808). Water Colour. $16\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.



THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY. Water Colour.
$13\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{16}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

And the scribes and the Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote in the earth.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And again he stooped down and wrote in the earth.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no one condemned thee?" And she said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said unto her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, "I am the Light of the World: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life."

(Tradition tells that what Christ wrote in the earth was, man by man, and case by case, the particular instances in which the accusers had themselves done that with which they charged the woman; and that each man left when he saw that his own experience was known.)

THE BETRAYAL (*c.* about 1808). Water Colour.
14¼ × 12.
Alan Barlow, Esq.

SOLDIERS CASTING LOTS FOR CHRIST'S GARMENTS (1800). Water Colour. 16½ × 12¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE ENTOMBMENT (*c.* about 1808). Water Colour. 15 × 12.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

ANGELS HOVERING OVER THE BODY OF JESUS (1808).

Water Colour. $16\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{3}{4}$.

Sydney Morse, Esq.

(*Note.*—The following lines from *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas*, would seem to have, as comparison will show, a carefully designed parallel:—

" waving high over his head
Two winged immortal shapes were seen, one standing at his feet
Toward the east, one standing at his head toward the west,
Their wings joined in the Zenith overhead; but other wings
They had that clothed their bodies like a garment of soft down,
Silvery, bright, shining upon the dark blue sky in silver.
These wings touched the heavens. Their fair feet hovered above
The swelling tides; they bent over the dead corse like an arch,
Pointed at the top in highest heaven of precious stones and pearl.
Such is a vision of all Beulah hovering over the sleeper.")

THE ANGEL ROLLING AWAY THE STONE FROM THE SEPULCHRE (1808). Water Colour. 16 × 11⅞.

Mrs. Sydney Morse.

THE ASCENSION (*c.* about 1808). Water Colour.
$16\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE HYMN OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES.
(*c.* about 1808). Water Colour. 15 × 12½.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN MARY (1803).
Water Colour. $14\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{3}{4}$.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH (1803). Water Colour. $14\frac{5}{8} \times 13\frac{7}{8}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS (1822).
Water Colour. $15\frac{3}{4} \times 13$.
Miss Carthew.

GOD WRITING ON THE TABLES OF THE COVENANT (*c* about 1806). Water Colour. 16½ × 13⅜.

National Gallery, Edinburgh.

THE BURIAL OF MOSES. Water Colour. $13\frac{5}{8} \times 12\frac{1}{4}$.

Sydney Morse, Esq.

EZEKIEL'S VISION. Water Colour. 11¼ × 15⅝.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

> And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.
>
> Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures.
>
> And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.
>
> And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.
>
> As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a Man, and the face of a Lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an Ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an Eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two wings covered their bodies.
>
> And they went every one straight forward: whither the Spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And above the firmament that was over their heads was a likeness of a Throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the Throne was the likeness as the appearance of a Man above upon it.
>
> *Ezekiel* i. 4–26.

(*Note.*—Here again appear the "four Beasts" of the Revelation, who are the Four Zoæs of Blake's Prophetic Books.)

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES. Water Colour. 8¼ × 12$\frac{1}{10}$.

The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard, U.S.A.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

And he said unto me, "Son of Man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

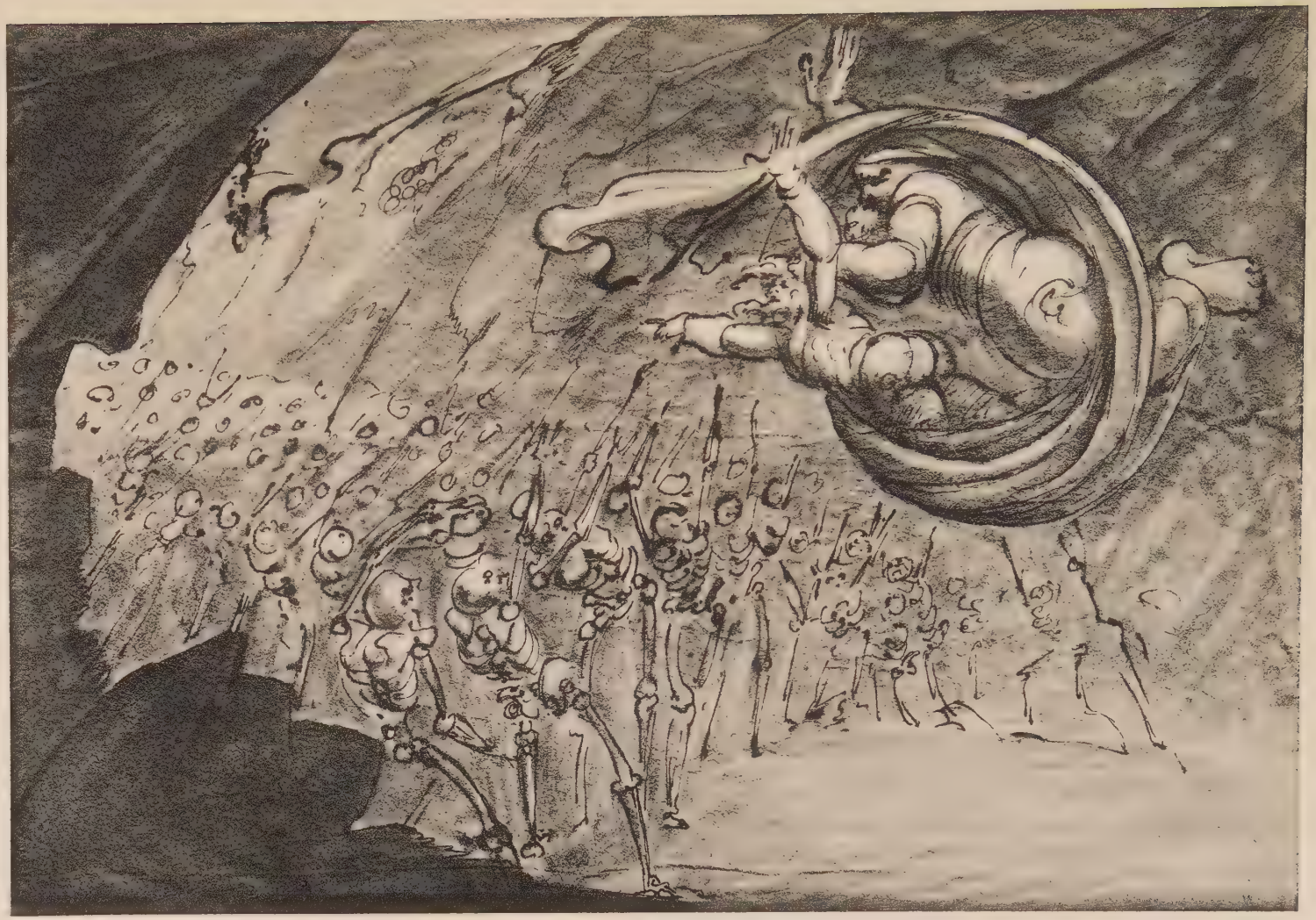
Again he said unto me, "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, 'O ye dry bones, hear the voice of the Lord.' Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Then said he unto me, "Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, Son of Man, and say to the wind, 'Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'"

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Ezekiel xxxvii. 1–10.



THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE (about 1792). Painting in Sepia. 13 × 19¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, "Son of Man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of man."

So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

Ezekiel xxiv. 15–18.

THE COMPLAINT OF JOB (about 1792). Painting in Sepia.
$13\frac{3}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{8}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

What is Man, that Thou shouldest magnify him?
And that Thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?
And that Thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?
How long wilt Thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?
I have sinned; what shall I do unto Thee, O Thou Preserver of Men?
Why hast Thou set me as a mark against Thee, so that I am a burden to myself?
And why dost Thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?
For now shall I sleep in the dust; and Thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Job vii. 17–21.

SATAN SMITING JOB WITH SORE BOILS
(*c.* about 1799). Tempera on Mahogany Panel.
12⅜ × 16¾.

National Gallery, Millbank.

So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

Job ii. 7.

GOD ANSWERING JOB OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND (*c.* about 1799). Water Colour. 16½ × 14.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

FAMINE (1805). Water Colour. $11\frac{3}{4} \times 15\frac{1}{16}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

PLAGUE (1805). Water Colour. $11\frac{1}{8} \times 16\frac{1}{8}$.

The Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Mass.

FIRE (about 1805). Water Colour. 12¼ × 16⅜.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

PESTILENCE: THE DEATH OF THE FIRST-BORN
(*c* 1805). Water Colour. $11\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{3}{8}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

DAVID AND GOLIATH. Water Colour. $13\frac{1}{4} \times 14\frac{3}{16}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

THE GHOST OF A FLEA (about 1820). Tempera on Panel.
$8\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{8}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

With respect to the vision of the Ghost of the Flea, seen by Blake, it agrees in countenance with one class of people under Gemini, which sign is the significator of the Flea; whose brown colour is appropriate to the colour of the eyes in some full-toned Gemini persons. And the neatness, elasticity, and tenseness of the Flea are significant of the elegant dancing and fencing sign Gemini. This spirit visited his imagination in such a figure as he never anticipated in an insect. As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power, of the truth of these visions, on hearing of this spiritual apparition of a Flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw: he instantly said, "I see him before me now." I therefore gave him paper and a pencil, with which he drew the portrait, of which a facsimile is given in this number. I felt convinced by his mode of proceeding that he had a real image before him, for he left off, and began on another part of the paper to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the Flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch, till he had closed it. During the time occupied in completing the drawing, the Flea told him that all fleas were inhabited by the souls of such men as were by nature blood-thirsty to excess, and were therefore providentially confined to the size and form of insects; otherwise, were he himself, for instance, the size of a horse, he would depopulate a great portion of the country. He added, that if in attempting to leap from one island to another, he should fall into the sea, he could swim, and should not be lost. This spirit afterwards appeared to Blake, and afforded him a view of his whole figure; an engraving of which I shall give in this work.

John Varley, *A Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy*, pp. 54–55.

GLAD DAY (*c.* 1795). Colour-printed Drawing.
10¾ × 7⅞.

British Museum.

Nights Candles are burnt out, and Jocund day
Stands tipto on the mistie Mountaines tops.

Romeo and Juliet, III, v.

(*Note.*—*Glad Day* is the title by which this is known. The engraving on which this Colour-printed Drawing was done seems to have been originally known as "Jocond Day." Some impressions of the engraving are inscribed with the following lines, which appear to have been added some time between 1800 and 1804:

Albion arose from where he labour'd at the Mill with slaves:
Giving himself for the Nations, he danced the dance of Eternal Death.)

ELIJAH ABOUT TO ASCEND IN THE CHARIOT OF FIRE (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 17 × 21.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

> And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.
>
> 2 *Kings* ii. 11.

GOOD AND EVIL ANGELS. (1795). Colour-printed Drawing.
17½ × 23¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

(*Note.*—This is one of two designs Blake took from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, printed about 1790, for subjects of his Colour-printed Drawings. In the *Marriage* the figures are reversed. This would seem to suggest that Blake had the design in the book before him when making this drawing. The other is *Nebuchadnezzar*. This design appears at the foot of Plate 4, under the words, "Energy is Eternal Delight." The title given above is that which is usually given to this drawing, following on Rossetti's *List* in Gilchrist. A more correct title would probably be *The Jealousy of Los*. The figures are evidently Los, Enitharmon, and the infant Orc. The incident is described briefly in *The Book of Urizen*, at chapter VII, verses 3–5, and again, more amply and with fuller detail, in *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas*, Night V, ll. 66–103. The dates show the progression of the incident in Blake's mind. The *Marriage* was printed about 1790. *The Book of Urizen* is dated 1794. This drawing is dated 1795. *Vala* was begun about 1797. In the drawing in the *Marriage* there is nothing to indicate anything astray with Los' sight. Nor does anything of the kind appear in *The Book of Urizen*. In this drawing this detail appears for the first time; and in *Vala* Los' eyes are thus described: "In globes his fiery eyelids faded." The blindness of jealousy was apparently a detail that only occurred to Blake after he had made a detailed and full drawing of the incident. There are other indications in *Vala* of the development of the incident as a result of this drawing.)

LAMECH AND HIS TWO WIVES (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 17 × 24.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE LAZAR HOUSE (1795). Colour-printed Drawing.
18⅝ × 23¼.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

Immediately a place
Before his eyes appeard, sad, noysom, dark,
A Lazar-house it seemd, wherein were laid
Numbers of all diseas'd, all maladies
Of ghastly Spasm, or racking torture, qualmes
Of heart-sick Agonie, all feavorous kinds,
Convulsions, Epilepsies, fierce Catarrhs,
Intestin Stone and Ulcer, Colic pangs,
Dropsies, and Asthma's, and Joint-racking Rheums.
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans, despair
Tended the sick busiest from Couch to Couch;
And over them triumphant Death his Dart
Shook, but delaid to strike, though oft invok't
With vows, as thir chief good, and final hope.

Paradise Lost, XI. 477–490.

PITY (*c.* 1795). Colour-printed Drawing. $17\frac{3}{4} \times 21$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

And Pitty, like a naked New-borne Babe,
Striding the blast, or Heavens Cherubim, hors'd
Upon the sightlesse Curriors of the Ayre,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That teares shall drowne the winde.

Macbeth, Act I, Sc. vii.

NEWTON (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 18 × 23⅛.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

HECATE (*c.* 1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 17 × 23.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR (1795). Colour-printed Drawing. 18×24.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

> The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.
>
> *Daniel* iv. 33.

(*Note.*—This is one of two designs Blake took from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, printed about 1790, for subjects of his Colour-printed Drawings. In the *Marriage* the figure is reversed. This would seem to suggest that Blake had the design in the book before him when making this drawing. In his Notebook, known as the *Rossetti MS.*, two sketches are found. The other is known by the title of *Good and Evil Angels*. The *Marriage* closed on Plate 24 with this drawing, with the inscription beneath it, " One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression." This is one of Blake's root-ideas, that men who do not live in the freedom of spiritual illumination fall into the animal life, the law of which is oppression. He describes the state many times in his Prophetic Books, as, for instance, in *The Four Zoas*, Night VI. 113–116:

> There beheld he forms of Tigers, Lions, dishumanized men,
> Many in serpents and in worms stretched out enormous length
> Over the sullen mouldy and slimy tracks obstruct his way
> Drawn out from deep to deep.

He uses the same idea to express the period of his life, while trusting to the reason, before his illumination in 1804. In his letter to Hayley, in which he describes himself as 'drunk with intellectual vision,' 23 October, 1804, he wrote: " Nebuchadnezzar had seven times passed over him; I have had twenty. Thank God I was not altogether a beast as he was; but I was bound in a mill among beasts and devils. These beasts and these devils are now, together with myself, become children of light and liberty, and my feet and my wife's feet are free from fetters.")

THE BODY OF ABEL FOUND BY ADAM AND EVE (*c.* about 1799). Tempera on Panel, varnished. 12¾ × 17.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC (*c.* about 1799). Tempera on Canvas. $15\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{3}{4}$.

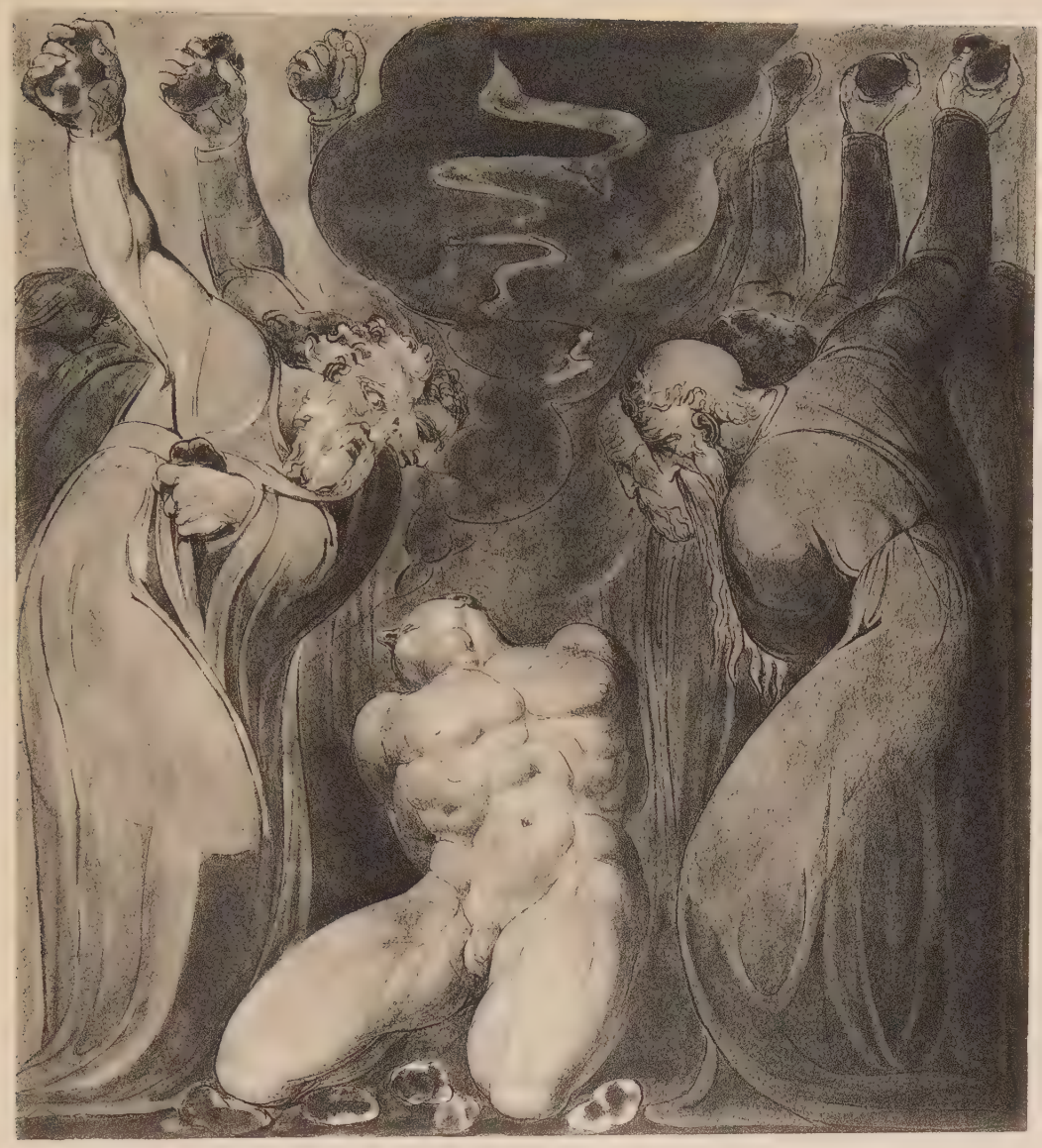
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

JACOB'S LADDER (*c.* about 1800). Water Colour.
$14\frac{5}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

> And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
>
> *Genesis* xxviii. 12.

THE STONING OF ACHAN. Water Colour. 15 × 13⅛.
Miss Carthew.



SAMSON SUBDUED (1805). Water Colour. 14 × 15.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

THE SACRIFICE OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER
(1803). Water Colour. 14¼ × 13.
W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON (1806). Water Colour.
15⅛ × 15.

Frank T. Sabin, Esq.

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down,
Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song;
And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

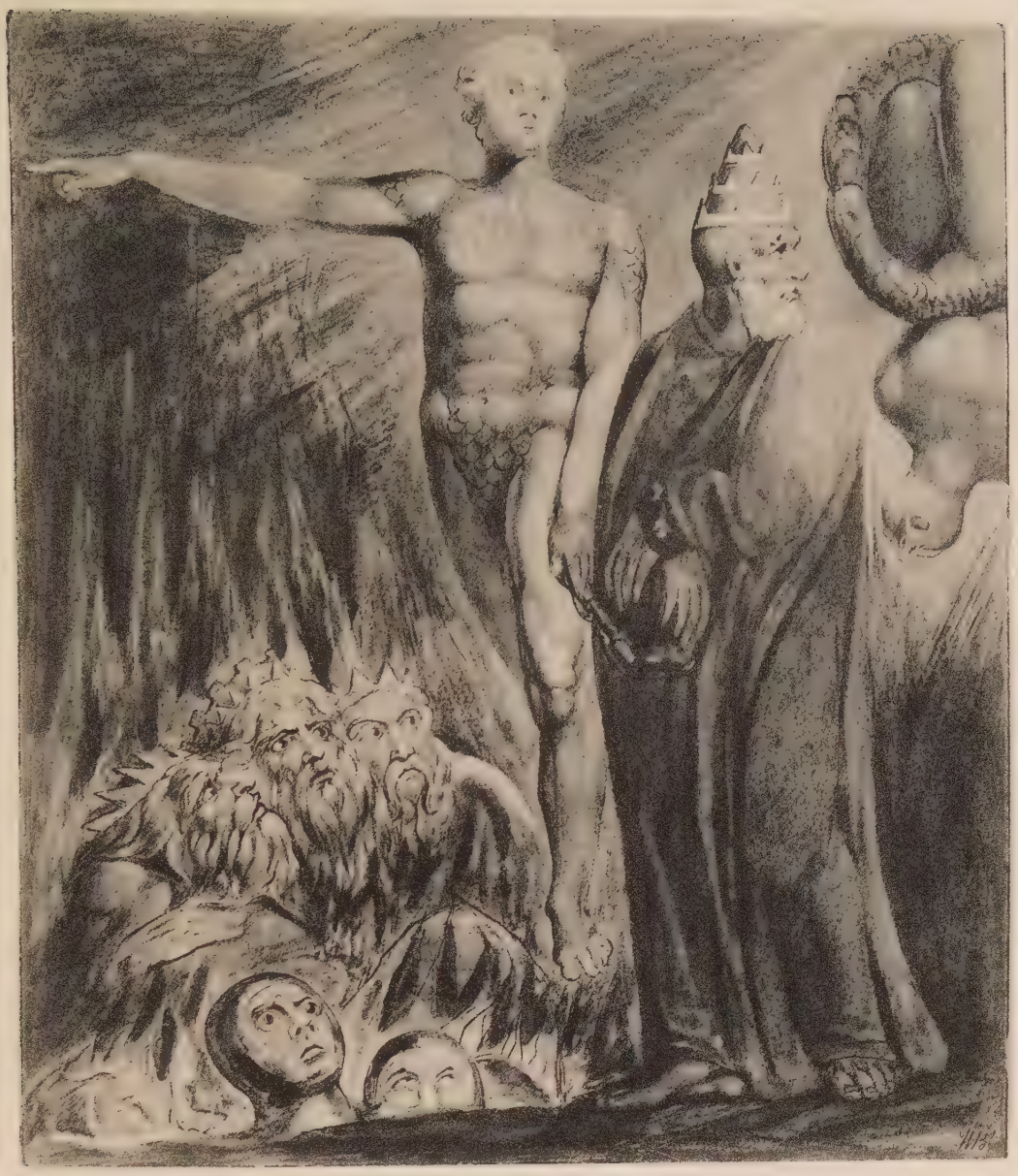
Psalms cxxxvii. 1–3.

THE KING OF BABYLON IN HELL. Water Colour.
$12\frac{1}{16} \times 14\frac{1}{16}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming :
It stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth ;
It hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.
All they shall speak and say unto thee,
" Art thou also become weak as we ?
Art thou become like unto us ?
Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols.
The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee."

Isaiah xiv. 9–11.



THE WHORE OF BABYLON (1809). Water Colour. $10\frac{5}{8} \times 8\frac{7}{8}$.
British Museum.

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, "Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the Great Whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

And upon her forehead was a name written "*Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth.*" And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great wonder.

Revelation xvii. 1–6.

PHILOCTETES AND NEOPTOLEMOS AT LEMNOS (1812).

Water Colour. 17½ × 13.

Francis Edwards, Esq.

(Philoctetes speaks :)

Oh ! in thy father's, in thy mother's name,
By all the sanctities of home, my son,
Leave me not, I adjure thee, here alone,
Abandoned to such ills as thou hast seen
And others worse whereof thou hast been told.
Think of me as a stowaway ! well I know
The irksomeness of such a passenger.
Bear it ! to true nobility of soul
All shame is shameful, honour honourable.
And it would smirch thine honour to decline
This task, my son ; to do it, bring thee fame
And glory, if ye carry me alive
To Oeta.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. F. Storr's Translation.

Mölcke. 1812

QUEEN KATHERINE'S DREAM. Water Colour. 16×13.

Mrs. Sydney Morse

THE VISION.

Enter solemnely tripping one after another, sixe Personages, clad in white Robes, wearing on their heades Garlands of Bayes, and golden Vizards on their faces, Branches of Bayes or Palme in their hands. They first Conge unto her, then Dance: and at certaine Changes, the first two hold a spare Garland over her Head, at which the other foure make reverend Curtsies. Then the two that held the Garland, deliver the same to the other two, who observe the same order in their Changes, and holding the Garland over her head. Which done, they deliver the same Garland to the last two: who likewise observe the same Order. At which (as it were by inspiration) she makes (in her sleepe) signes of rejoycing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven. And so, in their Dancing vanish, carrying the Garland with them. The Musicke continues.

Katherine. Spirits of peace, where are ye? Are ye all gone?
And leave me heere in wretchednesse, behinde ye?
Griffith. Madam, we are here.
Katherine. It is not you I call for,
Saw ye none enter since I slept?
Griffith. None Madam.
Katherine. No? Saw you not even now a blessed Troupe
Invite me to a Banquet, whose bright faces
Cast thousand beames upon me, like the Sun?
They promis'd me eternall Happinesse,
And brought me Garlands, *Griffith*, which I feele
I am not worthy yet to weare: I shall assuredly.

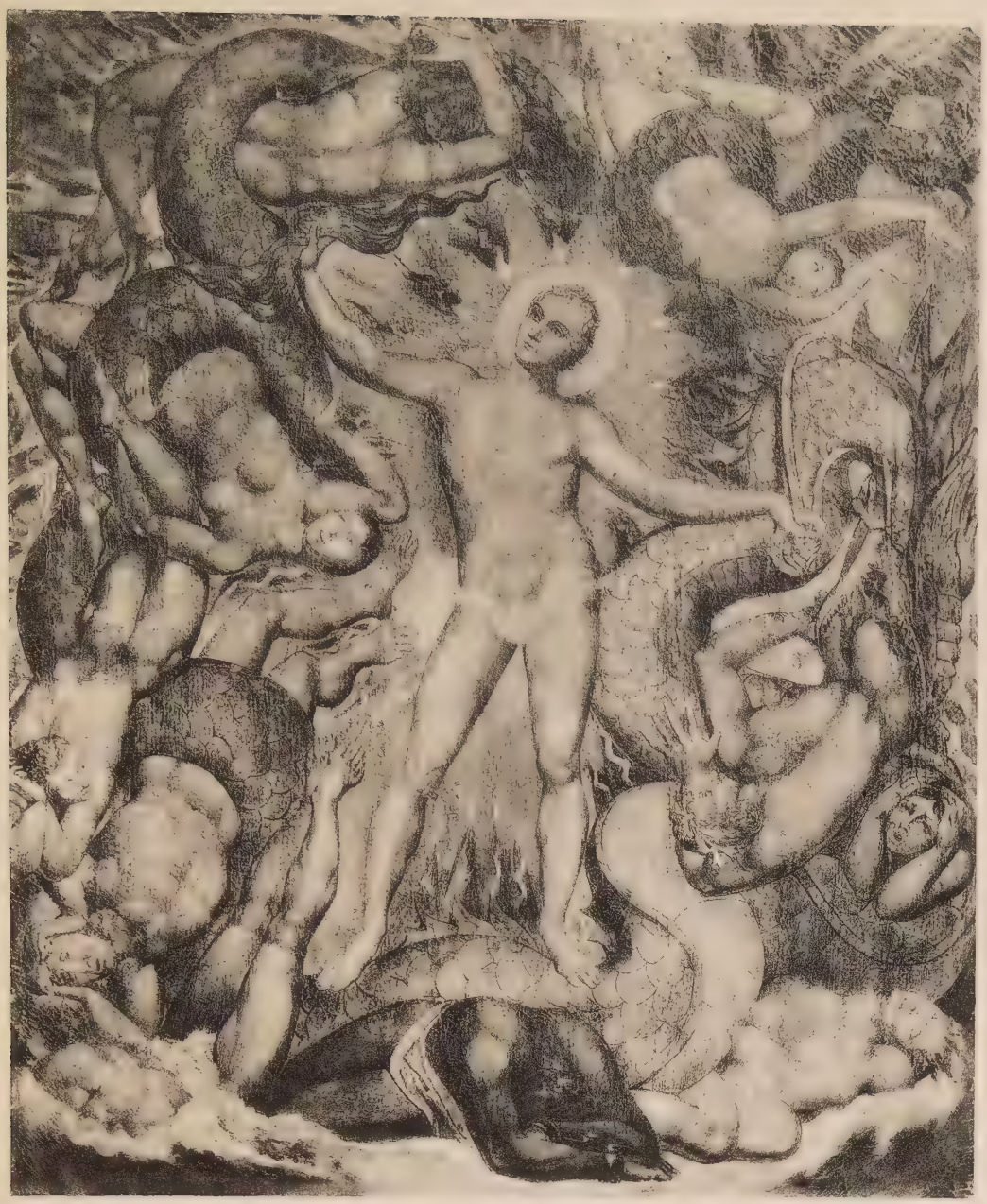
Henry VIII, Act iv, Sc. ii.

MEDITATIONS AMONG THE TOMBS. Water Colour.
16⅞ × 11½.

National Gallery, Millbank.

(*Note.*—This is a typical example of Blake's habit of building his most elaborate visions upon the least prompting. The occasion for this vision was James Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs;* but indeed it is to be feared that James Hervey would have been surprised, and perhaps startled, at that which he had awakened. The only point of contact is that when Hervey, having resolved to "take a walk to the Church," and "being resolved to spend a few Minutes under the sacred Roof," and finding that "in a Situation so retired and awful, I could not avoid falling into a Train of Meditations, serious and mournfully pleasing," is found standing in awe before the altar, on which stands the bread and wine. To the right of the Altar is the font of "Baptism"—"the two introducers into eternal life." Beyond that, save for the least hints from Hervey, the rest is Blake. To right and left of Hervey, as he faces the altar, float the *Guardian Angel* and the *Angel of Providence*, a characteristic conjunction. Above the altar appears the Transfiguration of Christ, from which steps mount to the throne of God, over whom the words are written: "God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire." Upon these steps, as they mount upward, appear: (1) Solomon; (2) David with his harp; (3) Aaron surrounded by angels and swinging a censer; (4) Abraham sacrificing Isaac, marked "Abraham Believed God"; the Mother of Leah and Rachel and the Mother of Rebecca; (5) Noah above the waters of the flood, and the Ark behind, beneath the Rainbow; (6) Enoch holding a scroll; (7) Cain and Abel, pursued by the Serpent, leaving Adam and Eve, Eve lying across Adam's knees. The entire stairway is thus the Biblical passage of Time. To right and left appear the joys of resurrection. Here the tombs mentioned by Hervey, are shown yielding up their dead; and various angels mingle in the scene, such as the "Ministering Angels," a "Protecting Angel," "An Angel of Death" and "Recording Angels." The various titles given to the reunions are in the main taken from Hervey, such as the following: "Where is your Father?" "She died on her Wedding Day," "Sophronia died in Childbed," "Orphans," "The Lost Child." High above all, to right and left of the Throne of God, in accordance with Blake's symbolical placing, appear Mercy, surrounded by angels of light, and Wrath, seeking vengeance by pursuing a figure that flies terrified through red flames. This Vision should be carefully compared with "The Last Judgment," and Blake's description of that drawing.)

NELSON GUIDING LEVIATHAN (before 1809).
Tempera on Canvas. $29\frac{3}{4} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$.
National Gallery, Millbank.

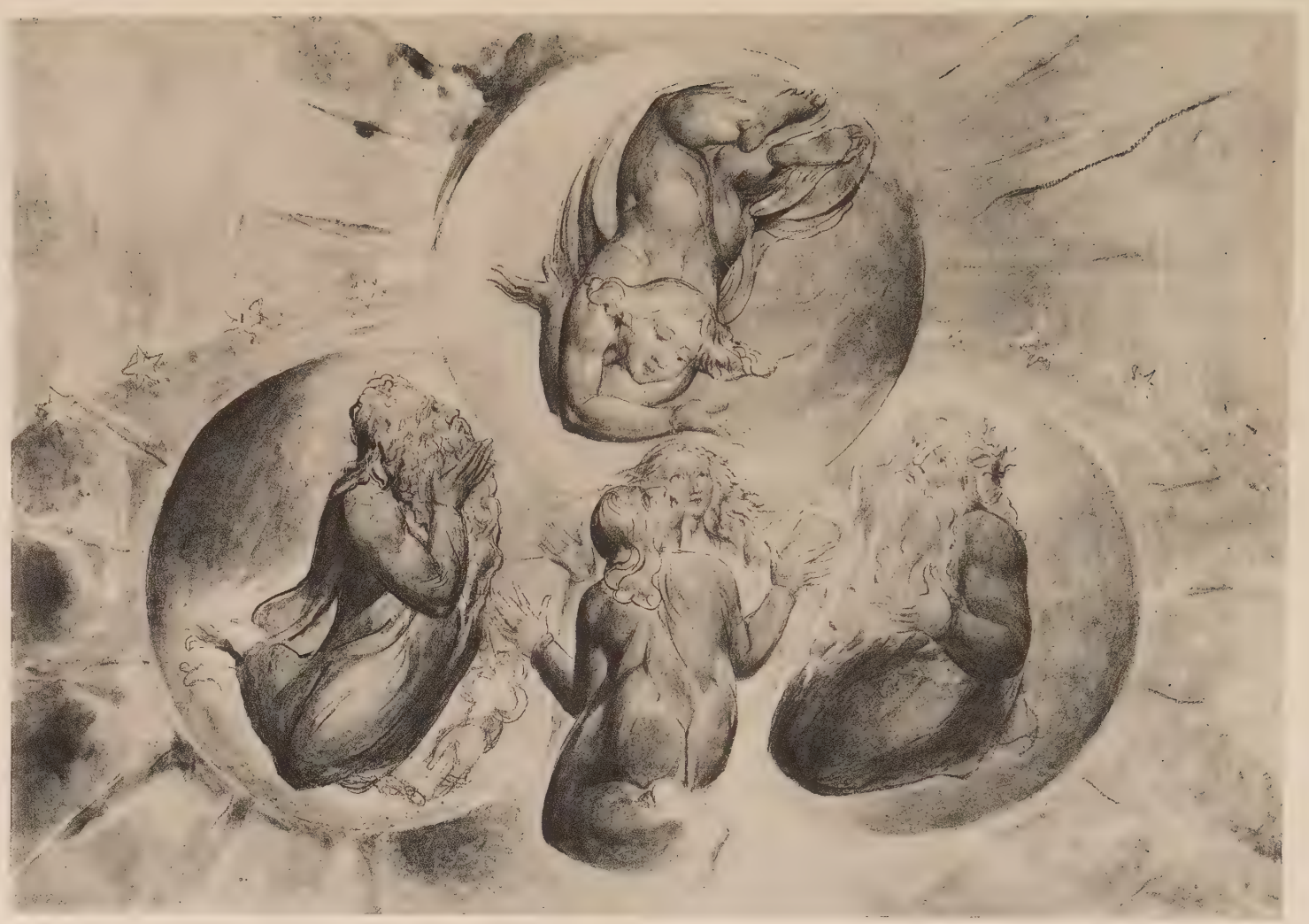


THE COMING OF ST. JOHN, WHILE ST. PETER AND ST. JAMES AND BEATRICE CONVERSE WITH DANTE (about 1825). Water Colour. 24¾ × 14½.

British Museum.

Like as a virgin riseth up, and goes,
And enters on the mazes of the dance;
Though gay, yet innocent of worse intent,
Than to do fitting honour to the bride:
So I beheld the new effulgence come
Unto the other two, who in a ring
Wheel'd, as became their rapture. In the dance,
And in the song, it mingled. And the dame
Held on them fix'd her looks; e'en as the spouse,
Silent, and moveless. "This is he, who lay
Upon the bosom of our pelcian:
This he, into whose keeping, from the cross,
The mighty charge was given." Thus she spake.

Paradiso, Canto XXV (H. F. Carey's translation).



PAOLO AND FRANCESCA IN THE WHIRLWIND OF LOVERS (about 1825). Water Colour. $23\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$.

City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

She replied:
"No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy, when misery is near at hand. That kens
Thy learn'd instructor. Yet so eagerly
If thou art bent to know the primal root,
From whence our love gat being, I will do
As one, who weeps and tells his tale. One day,
For our delight we read of Lancelot,
How him love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us. Oft-time by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
Fled from our alter'd cheek. But at one point
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
The wished smile so rapturously kiss'd
By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd. The book and writer both
Were love purveyors. In its leaves that day
We read no more." While this one spirit spake,
The other wail'd so sorely, that heart-struck
I, through compassion fainting, seem'd not far
From death, and like a corse fell to the ground.

Inferno, Canto v (H. F. Carey's translation).

HELL Canto 5

VALA, HYLE AND SKOFELD (about 1804). Coloured Print.
$6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$.

W. Graham Robertson, Esq.

(*Note.*—This is Plate 51 of the Prophetic Book *Jerusalem*, printed separately to be finished as a picture. The figure of Skofeld may be compared with that of Despair in The Lazar House, Plate 73.)

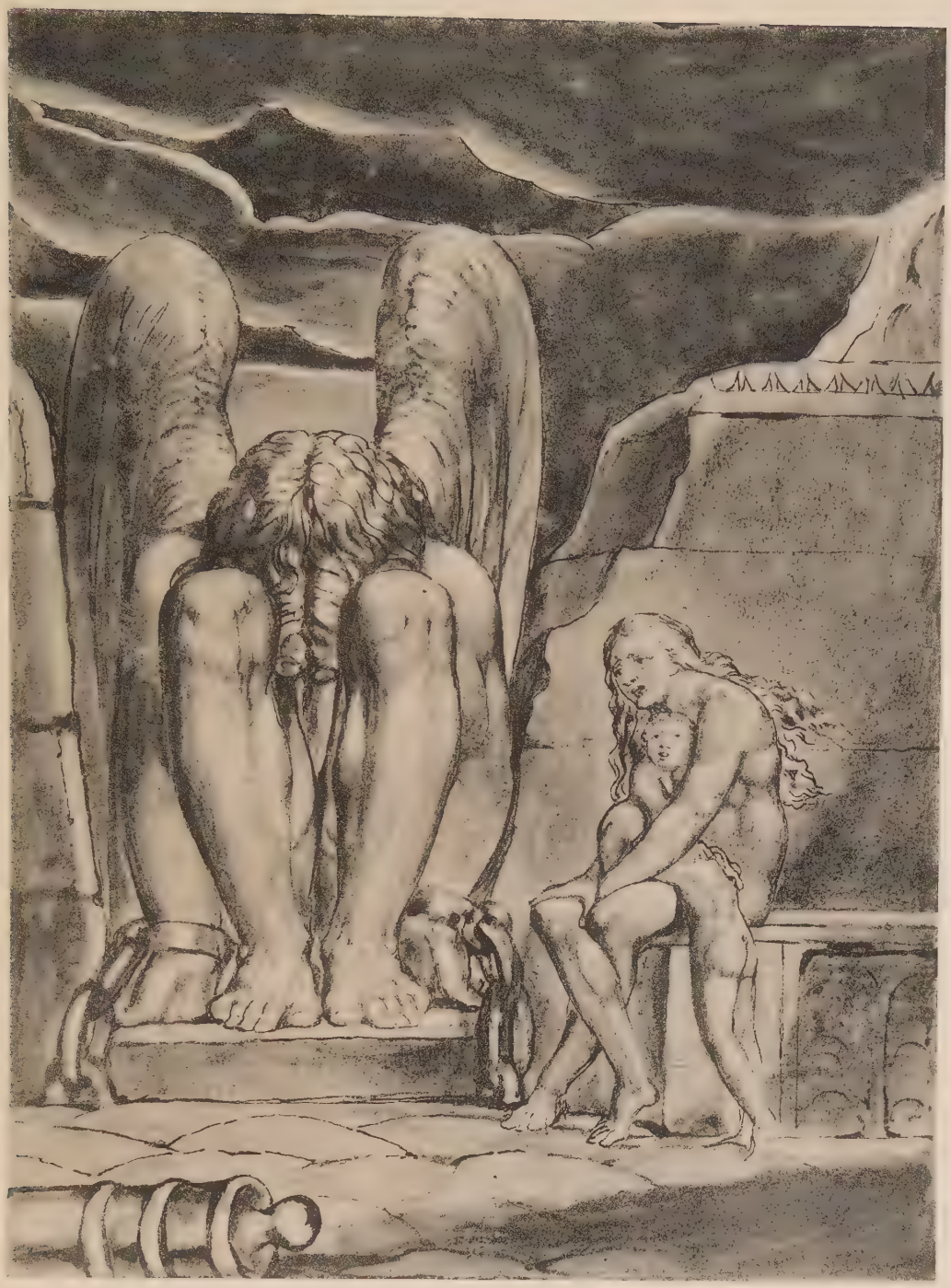
Vala
Hyla
Skofeld

HAR AND HEVA BATHING: MNETHA LOOKING ON.
Indian ink. $7\frac{1}{8} \times 10\frac{3}{4}$.

Edward Marsh, Esq.

(*Note.*—The characters are from Blake's early poem *Tiriel* in which, however, there is no scene corresponding with the drawing.)

FRONTISPIECE TO "AMERICA: A PROPHECY"
(1793). Coloured Print. 12 × 9¼.
T. H. Riches, Esq.



DRAWING FOR "EUROPE: A PROPHECY" (*c.* 1792).

Water Colour. $11\frac{1}{8} \times 7\frac{9}{16}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

(*Note.*—This would appear to be an original water-colour drawing which Blake used for Plate 2 of *Europe*. In that Plate the two female figures to the left, with the sky against which they appear, are cut out, the space being used for the text of the *Preludium*. The present drawing is therefore a separate picture, probably earlier than the Prophetic Book. There is a sketch for yet another drawing, which Blake used in part for *Europe*. See page 82.)

"COMUS" SERIES (*c.* 1810)

3. THE BROTHERS PLUCKING GRAPES. Water Colour.
$4\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{9}{16}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

(The reproduction is slightly larger than the original.)

Comus. Two such I saw, what time the labour'd Oxe
In his loose traces from the furrow came,
And the swink't hedger at his Supper sate;
I saw them under a green mantling vine
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots,
Their port was more than human, as they stood;
I took it for a faery vision
Of som gay creatures of the element
That in the colours of the Rainbow live
And play i'th plighted clouds.

Comus, 291–301.

"COMUS" SERIES (*c.* 1810)

6. THE BROTHERS OVERCOME COMUS. Water Colour.
$4\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{7}{10}$.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

(The reproduction is slightly larger than the original.)

The Brothers rush in with Swords drawn, wrest his Glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground; his rout make signe of resistance, but are all driven in. The attendant Spirit comes in.

Spirit. What, have you let the false enchanter scape?
O ye mistook, ye should have snatcht his wand
And bound him fast; without his rod revers't,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixt, and motionless.

Comus, 814–819.

W Blake

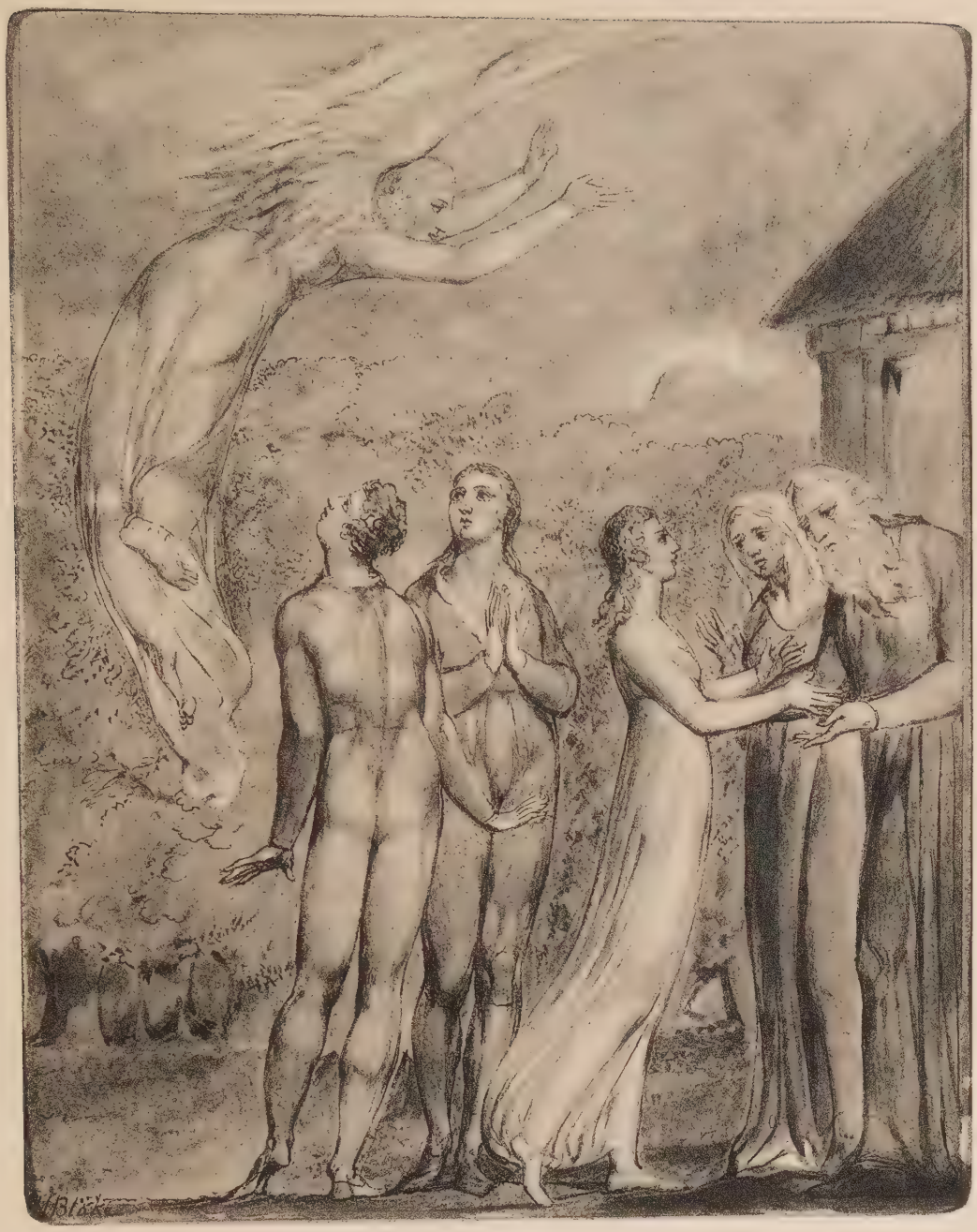
"COMUS" SERIES (*c.* 1810)

8. THE PARENTS WELCOME THEIR CHILDREN.
Water Colour. $4\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{9}{16}$.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

(The reproduction is slightly larger than the original.)

I shall be your faithfull guide
Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Fathers residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish't presence, and beside
All the Swains that there abide,
With Jiggs, and rural dance resort,
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and chere;
Com let us haste, the Stars grow high,
But night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

Comus, 944–957.



CHARACTERS FROM SPENSER'S "FAERY QUEENE"
(*c.* about 1809). Water Colour. 18 × 53¼.
Lord Leconfield.

(*Note.*—This is a companion picture to Blake's "Characters from Chaucer's 'Canterbury Pilgrims.'")

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